The TRAIL of the SERPENT

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

15.—

A Merry Xmas
to
Ray from Hazel

The Trail of the Serpent

or the Homicide at Hawke Hall

By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of "Nearest and Dearest," "Little Nea's Engagement," "The Lost Lady of Lone," "The Struggle of a Soul," "The Unloved Wife," Etc.

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The Trail of the Serpent

CHAPTER I

THE RUINED TOWER AND ITS TENANT

Here, above, around, below,
On mountain or in glen,
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power,
The weary eye may ken;
For all is rock at random thrown,
Black waves, bare rocks and banks of stone.
—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Why, what art thou,
So withered and so wild in thy attire,
That lookst not like th' inhabitants of earth,
And yet are on 't? Thou shouldst be woman,
And yet thy beard forbids us to interpret
That thou art so. —SHAKESPEARE.

SOME few years ago, in an ancient family of Cornwall, in England, a series of events occurred of a nature so extraordinary as to seem incredible had not their authenticity been positively proven in the courts of law.

For some time we hesitated to use in fiction these facts, which seemed too marvelous even for a romantic narrative; but now we have decided to give the strange history under the guise of the following story—reminding any

critic who may think the incidents "unreal," "impossible," that Shakespeare himself has warned us to

> "With caution judge of probability;
> Things deemed unnatural, even impossible,
> Experience oft hath proven to be true."

On the wildest part of the coast of Cornwall there is a frightful ravine cloven down through the cliffs, several hundred feet in depth, near the sea, but gradually lessening toward the interior, until half a mile away it disappears on the down.

At high tide this ravine is filled with water to half its depth and length. At low tide it is dry.

The chasm is called by the natives "Demondike," and there is a local tradition that it was fashioned out of the solid rocks by imps of darkness in one night.

But scientists hold that it was riven by some convulsion of nature in one moment.

Both science and tradition agree, however, that it had existed from a period to which the memory of man goes not back.

This portion of the coast belonged to the vast landed estate of the Hawkes, Earls of Hawkewood, whose ancient seat was situated on the edge of a deep forest some three miles back of the sea.

The course of Demondike was due south. On its western bank, near the ocean, were the ruins of an old watch-tower, of which nothing remained but the guard-room on the ground floor, and the dungeon cut in the solid rocks below.

No human habitation had ever been raised within a mile of this fearful abyss until about twenty years before the opening of this story, when a strange woman had suddenly appeared there with a child and had taken up her abode in the strong room of the old watchtower.

Who she was, where she came from, how she got there, or when exactly she reached the spot, no one knew or could discover.

All that was ascertained was this:

One bitter-cold morning in February, when the snow

was deep on the ground, the sky cloudless, the atmosphere crisp and clear, and objects could be seen from a long distance, the people of the hamlet of Hawkeville—a fishing village on the coast, some two miles east of Demondike, and also the property of the Earls of Hawkewood—observed smoke issuing from the old watchtower.

They knew it could not be on fire, since there was nothing left of it but stones, and stones do not burn, or if they do, never smoke.

In the dearth of incident in that isolated hamlet, even such an event as this seemed of great interest; and Penn, the locksmith, Tree, the tanner, and Proddy, the cobbler, set out through snow and ice, to walk to Demondike and find out whether a tribe of gypsies or a gang of smugglers had taken possession of the ruined watchtower—or whoever else might be the occupants.

They went for news, and returned, as Proddy, the cobbler, declared, with a hornet in each ear.

Over their mugs of ale at the Black Bull Tavern that night they made this report:

That, as they approached the ruined watchtower—of which, be it remembered, nothing was left but the strong guard-room on the ground floor and the crypt, or dungeon, beneath it—they noticed that a rude top had been built of loose stones on the broken chimney, on the side of the tower next to them as they approached it.

Going around, they found the doorway—from which the door had been missing for centuries—hung with a coarse blue blanket.

They pushed aside this blanket and entered the room, into which the light and air came only from loopholes in the walls.

They found here no one but a child sleeping in a poor bed made up in rough deal box for a cradle.

It was a dark-complexioned child of about one year old, they thought, and that was all they could tell about it.

There was a fire of driftwood in the middle of the huge fireplace.

There was a rude wooden bedstead with a very clean bed, and a bright patchwork quilt and white pillows upon it.

There was a rude oaken table and several rough deal chairs and other simple articles of furniture.

The men stared in astonishment. How came all these things here? They had seen no sign of cart or horse, no tracks but their own in the snow.

How, then, came these things here?

It seemed like witchcraft.

Before they could find any clue to the mystery the blanket was pushed aside and the "witch" herself entered the room.

She was certainly not a gypsy.

That they all saw at once.

She was a tall, masculine-looking woman of about fifty years of age, with coarse, red hair of that peculiar shade which fades and turns rusty, but never grows white, and with light-gray eyes, fearful to look upon in their ferocity.

She wore a long, blue-serge gown, and over her uncombed elf locks she had tied a three-cornered red handkerchief.

She had come in from outside, yet, cold as the weather was, she seemed to have had no other garment.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded in a harsh and strident voice, as she glared upon the intruders.

The three men stood mute with amazement for a moment, and then Tree, the tanner, took his hat off his head, and holding it down before him with both hands, said:

"If you please, mistress, we saw smoke coming outen the tower, and we made so bold as to walk over and see who had taken possession of the strong room."

"And now that you have seen, you may make 'so bold' as to turn around and go home again," said the Amazon, as she lifted up the blanket with one arm and stretched out the other with a commanding gesture.

"One word, mistress, if you please, before we go. We are his lordship's tenants, and this here property is on his lordship's land; so we would like to know whether you have got a permit from his lordship, Lord Hawkewood, or his lordship's steward, Mr. Traverse, or whether you be trespassing here," inquired Penn, the locksmith.

For all answer the virago strode across the room, seized

up a double-barreled gun, and taking deliberate aim at the speaker, exclaimed:

"If you do not leave the room instantly I will send the whole of one charge through your carcass and the other through your companion's."

The locksmith threw up his hands in deprecation and turned and fled.

The tanner and the cobbler followed suit, for they could not tell for which of them the furious woman intended the second charge, if she should fire the first.

Half in zeal and half in resentment they betook themselves to Mr. Traverse, the Hawkewood steward, and told him of their discovery of smoke at the tower, their visit of investigation, and their meeting with the woman, whom they represented to be a tramp and a trespasser, if no worse.

But, to their surprise, Mr. Traverse advised them to mind their own affairs and leave the woman at the ruined watchtower alone, if they wished to continue in his lordship's favor.

And so the squatter, as she was called, continued to live in the tower and to rear the child she had brought with her.

Nothing more transpired at that time concerning the stranger or the child, except that her name was Nan Crook, and that of the child was Ham Gow.

Mr. Traverse, the steward, had let that much out over a social glass of rum and water with the parish clerk, Mr. Carr, in the parlor of the Black Bull.

Later on, in the early spring, Nan Crook was joined by a handsome young woman of about sixteen years of age, enough like the Amazon to have been her own daughter, and whom the villagers, for want of any other known name, began to speak of as "Young Nan." She was supposed to be the mother of the child; but this was mere conjecture.

In the August following the sudden advent of Nan Crook at the ruined tower, an incident occurred which every one thought must result in that woman's expulsion from the neighborhood.

But here it is necessary to give some little account of the feudal chief of the place.

Roscius Hawke, a cadet of the noble house of Hawkewood, was a captain of hussars, with only his pay and without the remotest probability of succeeding to the title and estates at the time when, at the age of twenty-five, he met and loved, with all the passion of his fiery young heart, the beautiful Isabel Blemiss, the portionless daughter of the Vicar of Hawkewood Parish.

It was while he, Capt. Hawke, was on a visit to his uncle, Lord Hawkewood, at Hawke Hall, that he formed the young lady's acquaintance.

Very soon after that he made her an offer of marriage, which she accepted.

An early day was set for the wedding, and he invited his cousin, Lewis Manton, to come down and be introduced to his bride-elect, so as afterward to officiate as his groomsman.

Fatal confidence!

Lewis Manton joined the captain at Hawke Hall, where the latter was still stopping, and he met Isabel Blemiss.

Lewis Manton was handsome, fascinating, and the heir of an unencumbered estate of twenty thousand pounds a year.

A sudden, mutual passion sprang up between the trusted friend and the betrothed bride of Roscius Hawke.

In brief, the selfish and fickle beauty transferred her favor to the richer and handsomer suitor, who did not hesitate to steal his cousin's affianced bride, if that could be said to be stolen which was taken with the knowledge and connivance of a worldly-minded and unprincipled mother, who so effectually aided and abetted the treacherous friend and fickle sweetheart as to have them married from her house.

Roscius Hawke never got over his disappointment, and never forgave anyone concerned in the wrong that had been done him.

He who had seemed blameless up to that time became totally changed.

He lived the wild life of a reckless bachelor, both when

on duty in the barracks and when on furlough at some fashionable seaside resort, or in some continental city.

Long years afterward, when the gradual failure of the elder branch of the family left the title and estates of Hawkewood to him as heir-at-law, and he, at the age of sixty-five, became fifteenth Earl of Hawkewood, he entered upon his new and unexpected honors with two deep regrets—the first was, that his hated cousin and successful rival, Lewis Manton, was his heir-presumptive, who, failing him, would succeed to the earldom; bringing even an alien name to the ancient title! His second regret was, that he himself had not married earlier in life and provided himself with a long line of sons and daughters to succeed him, and to carry down his name, as well as his title, to remote generations.

He promptly determined to redeem his error by taking a wife, hoping it might not yet be too late to prevent the succession of Lewis Manton.

Thus hatred as well as ambition spurred him on to his late marriage.

He sought health and vigor in his bride, rather than rank, wealth, or even beauty, yet he found all these in a duke's daughter, who accepted his offer of marriage, notwithstanding his sixty-five years.

In the second year of this union his longing was gratified by the birth of an heir; but at a great sacrifice, for in the same hour in which the son came into this world the mother passed out of it.

The calamity was due to a fatal accident, which happened in this way: From her earliest infancy, the countess had suffered from an intense fear and horror of snakes—so that even the sight of a coiled string on the floor, or of a curled twig on the ground, would cause her to start and shriek, or turn pale and faint, as the case might be.

This morbid fear and horror had "grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength."

In her last days it also might have been, and probably was, greatly augmented by the incident to which we have alluded in connection with the wild woman, Nan Crook.

It was about the first of August, six months after the strange woman's arrival in the neighborhood, that Nan

made her way to the Hall and insisted on seeing the countess, who declined to admit her.

Nan, however, succeeded, by following one of the servants, in forcing her way to the presence of the lady, whom, without any apparent cause and in pure malignity, she proceeded to upbraid and curse, telling her that she, the countess—was a serpent, and should die by the fangs of a serpent.

The lady, nervous, sensitive, and very morbid, shrieked and fainted with fright. The woman was put out of the room and out of the house, and the lady treated until she recovered consciousness.

But the hag's words dwelt on the countess' mind and depressed her spirits, notwithstanding that her husband and all her attendants assured her that this malignant crone had, doubtless, heard of the countess' dread of snakes, and had taken advantage of it to terrify her.

But it happened unfortunately, on the last day of the same month of August, and some few weeks before she expected to become a mother, Lady Hawkewood was walking alone in a secluded part of the park, when a harmless little grass snake crossed her path.

She screamed and sprang aside, and in doing so inadvertently trod upon its tail.

The reptile, also frightened, and trying to defend itself, coiled around her ankle and struck its teeth into her flesh.

And then the lady fell to the ground in a deep swoon, just as one of the under-keepers, who had seen the whole affair from a distance, darted to her rescue.

The snake had made good its escape.

The lady was raised and laid upon a hastily constructed litter, made by a door taken from its hinges and covered with a quantity of pillows and blankets, all brought from the keeper's cottage.

She was borne tenderly and carefully to the Hall, where she arrived in a state of profound unconsciousness, from which she was only aroused by severe illness.

The village doctor was summoned in haste.

The next morning a delicate little baby boy was hurried too soon into the world.

But the same instant that the child drew his first breath of life the mother yielded up her last.

And the baby bore a birthmark that he would surely carry to his grave, even though he should live to the age of Methuselah—it was as if a slender green snake had coiled itself around his tiny ankle and left an indelible impression there!

The village doctor noticed it, and the nurse shuddered as she saw it.

Four days after this sudden birth and death the mortal remains of the Countess of Hawkewood were laid, with great pomp and ceremony, in the family mausoleum in the park.

The bereaved husband aroused himself from the stupor of grief into which his wife's sudden and shocking death had plunged him, and began to give all his thought and care to the fragile little being who had cost him so dear, and in whose frail life was bound up all his hopes of sending down his ancient name and title to future generations.

A very strong, healthy, cheerful young woman, whose own new-born babe had been taken to heaven, was engaged to nurse the motherless infant.

A young medical man, who had just made his mark in his profession by writing a prize treatise on the health and nurture of children, was specially engaged to reside at the Hall and devote all his care and skill to the preservation of the life of this precious child, in consideration of a salary double the amount of the income he could hope to make in the first years of his practice.

His contract with the earl was for three years, if the child should last so long.

All this involved extraordinary expense, which, however, could be well afforded by an earl with a rent roll of fifty thousand pounds per annum, and with the life of his only son and heir at stake.

In doing all this the Earl of Hawkewood was actuated by three of the strongest passions that could govern the mind of man—love, ambition, and hatred—love for his son of such intensity as can be felt by none save the aged parent of an only child, in whose life is bound up all his affection and all his pride; ambition that this precious son

should live to succeed to the honored and historic name and title that his forefathers had borne with dignity for so many generations; and lastly, hatred—fierce-burning and consuming hatred of the man who had wrought him a bitter, unpardonable wrong, and who, failing this fragile babe, should come into the ancient earldom, bringing even an alien patronymic to the time-honored title.

And well, we know, had Lewis Manton earned that hatred!

The grudge was an old one, dating back to the days of the youth of both, but it had lost nothing by the flight of time. On the contrary, it had grown deeper and fiercer with the passage of years!

Bitter as wormwood was the thought that this detested rival might succeed him.

And thus hatred and ambition as well as paternal love moved the earl to use every ordinary and extraordinary means for the preservation of his heir's life.

Under the intelligent direction of the young physician and the fostering care of the healthy nurse, the fragile baby boy thrived and grew strong, so that at the end of the first twelve months he was as fine a child as any other of his age.

But the earl, who had led a fast life and somewhat impaired his own originally good constitution, began now to fail.

Feeling that he might depart this world at any time, he made his will—not to devise his estate, for that was strictly entailed, every acre of it, and went with the title—but to provide proper guardianship for his heir.

And here he showed the "ruling passion strong," in the presence of the great change which we miscall "death."

He had led a wild and reckless life which had often imperiled his existence, and had finally shortened his days. He was, therefore, "posted" on the effects of such a career as his own had been, and he was resolved that his son should not be exposed to similar perils.

Horace should be "trained up in the way he should go" —the safe way that led through a straight and narrow road to respectability of character and length of days.

So he searched for and found the man he wanted as a guardian for his only son. You can get any sort of a man

you want in London if you have only money enough to seek him and to secure him.

The earl discovered a poor doctor of divinity who loved study better than he did the care of a parish; a man of highest church principles and strictest piety; much of a Pharisee and very much more of a martinet, but, withal, learned and very conscientious.

Dr. Paul Laude was "interviewed" by the earl in person, and found competent and willing to undertake the duties proposed to him.

In fact, the prospect of living at Hawke Hall, with a handsome salary, as resident guardian and tutor of the infant heir, passing his days, for twenty years or so, in the richly stored library, surrounded by heights and depths and lengths and breadths of shelves piled with priceless ancient lore; and with no heavier duties to perform than those of directing the studies and correcting the morals of one little lad—seemed very attractive indeed to the worthy old bachelor.

Associated with him in the guardianship of the child was Mr. Anthony Poinsett, the family solicitor, who would look after the estate and the moneyed interests of the heir, taking all that sort of trouble off the doctor's hands.

But the earl, who had the advantage of the constant presence of Dr. Ellis, the gifted young physician whom he had engaged for his son, lived longer than he had expected to do. He lived to see Horace a robust lad of five years; and then, at the age of seventy-two, he passed away, and the direct heir became, in his infancy, the sixteenth Earl of Hawkewood.

And thus the lad never remembered the time when he had not been "My Lord," and thus also he grew up as indifferent to his title as habit and usage could make him.

But here was this unfortunate heir to an ancient earldom and an immense estate placed in a position so false as to make him a dislocated member of the human family, and to be that is to suffer as much pain as a dislocated limb.

With all the high spirit and self-will of his father, and all the sensitive delicacy and nervous irritability of his mother, the young Horace required a training that should be at once firm and gentle, conscientious and sympathetic.

Instead of having such aids to the repression of his evil and the development of his good, he was placed in just the opposite circumstances—placed in the care of an intensely blinded egotist, Pharisee and martinet, who had much learning without any wisdom, and great piety without any charity.

This is no paradox, as it may seem to be.

Yet Dr. Paul Laude was sincere, earnest, and consistent in all that he thought, said, and did.

He lived at the Hall and devoted himself to his pupil with rigorous conscientiousness.

He took him from the hands of his nursery governess and personally drilled him in the rudimentary branches of an English education, saying that even for these a child required a thoroughly learned man for his teacher; for if the foundation were not perfect the superstructure could not be good.

He grounded his pupil well and solidly in all that he taught him, from the correct spelling of simple English words, on through days and years of hard work for both, up to the proper construction of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew theses.

Very little recreation was allowed the boy. A solemn walk, ride, or drive with his tutor every afternoon, a semi-annual visit in the spring to London, and in the autumn to the seaside—where the scene was changed, but not the companion or the habits—these comprised all of variety in the life of the youthful heir—except indeed the annual birthday fête, given on the first of every September to the tenants and dependants of Hawkewood in honor of their young landlord.

This was not much to the taste of the austere Dr. Laude, who had no sympathy with such vanities; but it was done in accordance with a family custom that had prevailed for centuries at Hawkewood and was held in great favor by the people, who looked forward all the year to the birthday fête on the first of September, with only less of joyful anticipations than they looked forward to the blessed Christmas.

One alteration the doctor made; he stopped the dancing. Beef and ale were unlimited, but fiddles and bagpipes

were prohibited. The men and women might eat to satiety and drink to stupidity, but they should not dance!

This gave great dissatisfaction. But the heir promised that, after he should have come of age, they should dance every year.

But just here we should revert to the story of the weird women who had taken undisputed possession of the ruined watchtower at the entrance of Demondike.

All the villagers had wondered much that they had been suffered to remain there, especially after the unprovoked and malignant assault upon the young countess, that might almost be said to have been the remote cause of the lady's death; and much gossip was rife concerning the cause of the earl's forbearance, which gossip took a definite form as years passed and the little vagrant at the dike developed a striking likeness to the little heir at the Hall, and the wild bachelor life of the earl was recalled to memory.

After the death of the earl and the accession of the infant heir, under the guardianship of the austere doctor of divinity, it was thought that the Hag of Demondike—as the woman in the ruined watchtower was popularly called—would, with her reputed daughter and grandchild, certainly be expelled from her lawless home and driven from the estate; but, to the continued wonder of the tenantry, she was suffered to remain, notwithstanding that her reputation was of the very worst description, a quack doctress, a fortune teller, and a witch, a harborer of thieves, poachers, and smugglers—all these and worse than these she was said to be!

It was confidently asserted that her mysterious arrival on the coast, which had so puzzled the good people of the locality at the time of its occurrence, was to be explained by the fact that a smuggling craft had brought her over from the coast of France, with all her household goods and with her questionable child.

One day a fishwoman, with a courageous heart and inquiring mind, went to the ruined watchtower to have her fortune told.

After having crossed the witch's hand with a bright sixpence and been fooled to the bent of her humor, she said:

"Now I will give you another sixpence if you will tell me what that boy's name is."

"Ham," curtly replied the woman.

"Ham? Yes, Ham, I know; but does that mean Hamlet, or Hamden, or Hamilton, or what?"

"It means Ham, the accursed son of Noah. No more nor no less!" cried the hag, with a glare from her light-gray eyes as terrible as it was unaccountable to the fish-woman, who rose up in a hurry and went off.

How the women and the child managed to live, it is hard to say, for the reputed quack doctress had no patients, the fortune teller few dupes, and the witch no victims; yet they seemed to want nothing.

When the dark-skinned, black-eyed boy was seven years of age, Granny Crook suddenly appeared in the village one Sabbath morning, and led him into the Sabbath-school, saying that she wished him taught to read and write.

If his Satanic majesty had called upon Dr. Paul Laude in person, and expressed an anxiety to learn "how to be saved," it could scarcely have created a greater sensation in the village.

However, the child so brought was in no wise to be cast out.

Little Ham was received into the Sabbath-school and taught to read; he was not taught to write, for they did not teach writing there; but in due time he was entered in the parish day school, which was flourishing under the patronage of the infant Earl of Hawkewood, or rather under that of his guardian, Dr. Paul Laude, in the earl's name.

In these schools little Ham, by his genuine curiosity, quick intelligence, and constant industry, made great progress in knowledge of elementary books, and also in the good opinion of his teachers. He was always neatly dressed and well-behaved.

It has been said that the parish school was supported by the young earl, through his guardian. Now, one of the most frequent goals of the solemn walks the little Lord Hawkewood was in the habit of taking with his tutor, Dr. Laude, happened to be the parish school, where the worthy doctor was accustomed to deliver a short lecture to the pupils.

Here Horace first met Ham Gow, and through some instinctive mutual affinity made his acquaintance, and soon inaugurated a surreptitious intimacy with the lad that was destined to affect the lives of both.

But so strictly did the tutor and guardian of the young Lord Hawkewood carry out the instructions of the late earl, in "training up the boy in the way he should go" and in guarding him from the "evil communications which corrupt good manners," that he seldom or never lost sight of his charge.

The master and pupil read, worked, and took their meals together; they also, as has been said, walked, rode, and drove together.

The only time in the day when Horace could escape from his mentor would be immediately after their early dinner, when the old doctor would fall asleep in his easy-chair and be safe for a couple of hours at least.

Then the lad would slip off to meet his one humble playmate, Ham Gow, whose school would be let out just about that hour, and they would go off on some boyish adventure together.

Even in those early days the little Earl of Hawkewood envied the freedom of the young vagrant of Demondike.

Strangely enough, the careful guardian and tutor never suspected these stolen adventures, or even the acquaintance that had sprung up between his high-born, jealously guarded ward and pupil and the nameless, tameless young vagrant of Demondike who was only known as Ham Gow.

At this time young Gow had not a bad reputation.

Under the eyes of his pastors and masters he was a model pupil, for he really had a very bright, inquiring mind, and his progress did them credit.

But out of their sight he was as daring and reckless a boy as you would meet within a year's journey.

It was doubtless this wild element in the young scamp's character that formed his chief attraction for the too strictly guarded little earl.

Many a truant expedition and many a lawless adventure had they together.

In their first intimacy they only met surreptitiously in the daytime while the old doctor would be enjoying his

after-dinner nap; and their worst misdemeanors were then the robbing of birds' nests or apple orchards on the earl's own land.

But later on they grew more reckless, so that Horace would rise from his bed at night and steal out to join Ham, who would be waiting for him in the park, and they would go out poaching in the little lord's own preserves.

Thus the young earl would, in company with his confederate, kill his own game and rob himself—all for a mere "lark" to bother and mystify the gamekeepers and have some "fun" out of them.

One unlucky night, when the keepers were out, armed, looking for poachers, the boys were fired at, very slightly wounded with birdshot, and taken prisoners before they were recognized.

Then you may judge of the terrible fright Gubbins, the head keeper, was in at having injured his youthful lordship.

Hanging for himself and all his companions seemed to be the mildest form of punishment he anticipated.

But all he had to do was to convey the two prisoners to the Hall, and wake up the servants, and get the butler to call the Rev. Dr. Laude.

Now, if there was terror among the gamekeepers, there was certainly consternation among the servants.

And when Dr. Laude came down, his shame and horror at discovering his ward and pupil in such a plight was unlimited and utterly indescribable.

His emotions deprived him of the power of speech.

Horace laughed aloud, and Ham joined him.

Then Horace said:

"Doctor, you can't prosecute a fellow for poaching in his own preserves, can you? No, nor his friend for going with him, either," he added, turning and clasping the hand of Ham as if to protect him.

"Leave my presence, sir!" exclaimed the shocked and offended tutor, as soon as he could speak. "As for you," he continued, turning to the terrified keepers, "you did right to shoot. If you had killed them both in the exercise of your duties you would have been blameless. Now turn that young vagabond out of the house, and if you ever

catch him on the premises again put him in the stocks," he concluded, pointing to Ham Gow.

"Thank your reverence very much. You needn't trouble, Gubbins—I can get off without you. Good-by, Horry, I wouldn't be you for all you possess!" exclaimed the young outlaw, as he turned and left the Hall.

The result of this escapade was that the young nobleman went immediately to Eton, and the young vagabond, missing his companion, and weary with solitude and monotony, ran away to sea.

Dr. Paul Laude accompanied the young earl to Eton, and took up his abode in lodgings near the college, that he might personally superintend the studies and the conduct of his charge.

After that the young nobleman and his wild companion saw but little of each other, Lord Hawkewood passing his time at college, and Ham Gow coming and going to and from the neighborhood of Demondike at long intervals of time. Later on, when the young earl entered Oxford, Dr. Paul Laude accompanied him thither also, and took lodgings for both in the same house, that he might still assist in the higher and more abstruse studies, as well as watch over the morals and manners of his pupil.

Now, if this constant surveillance had been irksome to the boy and galling to the youth, it had grown to be wellnigh maddening to the young man.

He began to hate his rank, his title, his heavy estates, and, above all, his tutor—to hate him, that is, with a strong antagonism, but not with malice. He did not wish to injure him—he only longed to be rid of him, and rid of him forever.

CHAPTER II

THE FATAL BIRTHDAY FÊTE

Ring, joyous chords! Ring out again!
A swifter still and a wilder strain!
They are here, the fair face and the careless heart,
And the stars shall wane ere the mirthful part.

But I met a dimly mournful glance
In a sudden turn of the flying dance.
I heard the tone of a heavy sigh
In a pause of the thrilling melody.

—FELICIA HEMANS.

THE young Earl of Hawkewood came down from Oxford, still accompanied by his guardian, to spend the summer vacation at Hawke Hall.

Youthful, handsome, amiable, intellectual, accomplished, wealthy, noble, honored, he was, nevertheless, discontented even to despondency.

He was now approaching his nineteenth birthday, and had rather more than two years yet to live and endure before he should reach his majority and—freedom.

He fretted grievously under the severe restraint imposed upon him, and he began to feel and to say to himself that the two remaining years of such tutelage could not be borne.

He fell into a state of melancholy verging on despair.

It was impossible that his condition should not become manifest to the whole establishment, as it did, long before it reached the obtuse perceptions of the absent-minded bookworm and martinet of routine whom he had for a guardian.

It is even possible that the mental condition of the ward might never have been observed by the guardian had not the fact been brought to his attention by Dr. Ellis, the young physician, who had, at one time, taken the exclusive charge of the young heir's health as resident medical attendant, and who was now following a lucrative and general practice in the village of Hawkewood and the surrounding country.

Dr. Ellis had seen the young earl at church on the first Sunday after his return. He had afterward called at the Hall to pay his respects. On both these occasions the physician had observed his former patient with a professional eye, and feeling the deepest interest in the young man, whose life he had been instrumental in saving, he took an early occasion to seek a private interview with the guardian, and lay the case of the ward before him.

"His lordship's life should be changed, or he may fall into melancholy madness," said the doctor, plainly.

"How would you have it changed?" inquired the guardian, with ponderous dignity.

"I would have his lordship go more into society, see more company—young company suitable to his age—and I would have him form the acquaintance of eligible young ladies with a view toward marriage at no very distant day," replied the doctor.

The guardian might have started if he had not been a very ponderous old man, for the words of the physician recalled to his mind a forgotten duty—a piece of instruction left by the late earl for the guidance of the guardian and the benefit of his ward—that the latter, as he grew toward manhood, should be associated with young ladies of his own rank and of suitable age, with a view to an early and advantageous matrimonial union.

He had not read his late patron's will, or the accompanying letter of instructions, since the day after the deceased earl's funeral; hence, though he had followed every direction that came into force at that time, and had continued up to the present, yet this, which was to affect the later years of the boy's minority, he had ignored and subsequently forgotten.

When the professor's mind was once aroused he could be very prompt in his actions.

He determined to make the approaching birthday fête of the first of September the occasion of bringing together the country families and introducing his ward to their acquaintance.

He consulted the young earl on the subject, but was met with so much indifference on the part of his lordship as to surprise and discourage him.

"Pray do as you please, and invite whom you please. You have always acted without reference to me. Continue to do so," had been Lord Hawkewood's answer.

So Dr. Laude, in addition to the usual out-of-doors fête given to the tenantry and retainers, issued cards for a dinner and ball to the gentry and nobility of the neighborhood.

These invitations were generally accepted by the old

friends and neighbors of the Hall family, who had been so long ignored as to have grown cynical over the seclusion of the young earl, and to have ascribed that seclusion to various causes not very complimentary to his lordship.

The Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors thought the young earl might be epileptic, or feeble-minded, from the fright his mother had received on the day before his premature birth; and Lewis Manton, the grandson of Lewis the traitor and of Isabel the fickle, thought that Horace must be very unhealthy in body and mind, and would not be likely to keep him long out of the title and estates to which he—Lewis—was the heir presumptive.

And Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Ball, of Bowling Downs, thought that nothing ailed the young man but want of wholesome amusement and cheerful society.

All these returned acceptances to the invitations.

The first of September, the day of the fête, was clear and bright.

The old Hall looked grand and festive as it stood a vast, dark-red, oblong building, flanked by four towers, and crowning a swelling hill, with a background of dense forest.

The Hall fronted the sea, from which, however, it was three miles distant, with a stretch of undulating downs between it and the coast.

On the day of the fête flags flew from the tops of the towers, and tents were spread and tables laid throughout the grounds for the accommodation of the tenantry and the agricultural laborers and their families.

All these were assembled at an early hour, for they were to be entertained and feasted all day long, until sunset, when they were to be dismissed to their homes—each man, woman, and child with a small present in money.

In the evening the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood were to be entertained with a dinner and ball.

It was afternoon, and the festivities on the grounds were at their climax.

Crowds of gayly dressed villagers and country people swarmed over the greensward and through the groves; old men and women ate and drank in the tents; young men and girls danced—for this occasion only—on the grass.

The young Earl of Hawkewood, pale, thin, and melan-

choly, walked among his guests—more like their idea of the ghost of a man than a man—bestowing a warm smile or a kind greeting upon some humble friend or acquaintance.

"Ah! poor young gentleman, he looks not long for this world," said Penn, the little red-haired locksmith.

"And then yon Lew Manton will be airl in his place," sighed Proddy, the small, gray-haired cobbler.

"Burn that Lew Manton!" exclaimed Tree, the tall, gaunt, swarthy tanner, of whom the people were accustomed to say that he had soaked his complexion in his own tanning vats.

These three men were cronies, always to be found together, and were now grouped around one end of a long table, filling themselves with bread, beef, and ale.

Meanwhile the young man walked on, the saddest human being on the grounds that day.

But presently his worn face lighted up with a smile as he hastened to meet a stranger whom he saw rather hesitatingly approaching from toward the sea.

A stranger! It was a tramp! A tramp of the roughest, rudest, and most disreputable aspect, yet one of a free, handsome, joyous, dare-devil countenance.

Yet the young earl hurried to meet him and held out his hand, exclaiming:

"Why, Ham! Dear old fellow! A thousand welcomes! I am so glad to see you!"

The tramp took off his battered hat and bowed low before his feudal chief.

"Ah! you bring with you the very breezes of life, motion, liberty! You come to me as the sea wind comes to the becalmed ship! as the thunderstorm and the rising torrent come to the dried-up stream and the stagnant pool! Your very garments flutter with freedom!" exclaimed the young earl.

The tramp stared at this rhapsody. He did not understand a word of it.

"Ah! it is fine to be you, Ham! It is very fine to be you!"

The tramp continued to stare with astonishment, as well he might.

Why, the speaker was the young Earl of Hawkewood, one

of the wealthiest noblemen in the British empire! This was the grand fête day, when all his tenantry and his retainers were being feasted on the grounds, and all the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood were to be entertained in the Hall—while he, the tramp, was at the best of times but a poor hanger-on to the estate, without a shilling of his own in the world, or the least disposition to earn one.

There could scarcely have been a greater contrast on earth than was shown in the relative positions of these two men.

Yet in their personal appearance they were singularly alike, notwithstanding the great difference in their costume—and gossip said that they were very near of kin.

Both were of the medium height, and of slender, elegant figures. Both had stately heads, broad, full foreheads, straight noses, short upper lips, and projecting chins. Both had dark-brown hair and beautiful dark-gray eyes, with heavy, overhanging eyebrows.

So far they were exactly alike, but here the likeness ended.

The young nobleman had a clear, pale complexion, well-trimmed, short hair, parted on the left side, and a well-clipped, short mustache, and he wore the faultless morning dress of a gentleman—a neatly fitting, closely buttoned black frock coat, gray pantaloons, patent leather boots, perfect gloves, speckless linen, and a white japonica in his buttonhole.

Ham Gow, the tramp, had a complexion so disguised with dust that it would have been difficult to tell its original hue, while he wore his dark hair and beard long and rough, and was clothed in a brown smock frock and loose tweed trousers, all much the worse for wear and tear, and had on his feet heavy boots, so laden with clay from muddy roads and so broken withal that they could scarcely keep their hold.

Surely if there was a very striking likeness in the forms and features of the earl and the tramp, there was an equally striking contrast in their costumes and positions.

"Fine to be me, my lord! That is likely enough!" exclaimed the tramp, with a stare of amazement and a harsh and bitter laugh.

"Yes! I repeat, it is fine to be you! You are free! You come and go when and where you like! And there is no one to say to you: 'Do this,' or 'Don't do that,' 'You must,' or 'You must not!' " persisted the young gentleman.

"No, there never has been. Not that ever I knew. Nobody ever cared that much for me," replied the tramp, with the harsh and discordant laugh that grated so unpleasantly on the sensitive ears of the young earl.

"Where do you come from last, Gow?" inquired his lordship.

"How can I tell, my lord? 'From going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down in it,' like Satan in the history of Job. Last night I slept on the sheltered side of a barn on Farmer Perry's place."

"Have you been out of England since I saw you last?"

" 'Since you saw me last!' Let us see. When was that, my lord?"

"About two years ago. Ah! I have a better memory than you have, Gow. I do not enjoy such a constant change of scene to confuse it, you know."

"Two years ago! Why, I have been all over the world in that time. I have dug for silver in Colorado, for gold in Australia, and for diamonds in Cape Colony," replied the tramp, grinning until he showed all his strong, white teeth in contrast to his dark mustache and beard.

"Oh! you happy fellow!" exclaimed the young earl, with a look of admiration and envy.

"Didn't find anything, though. Came back as poor as I went. Worked my passage home on an East Indiaman, from Calcutta, that stopped at the Cape of Good Hope," added the tramp.

"Still, I repeat, you are a happy fellow, to come and go so freely."

"One gets tired of that sort of thing after a while—deuced tired," exclaimed the tramp bitterly, as he eyed the young nobleman with a cynical air.

"See here; I know how tired a man may grow of monotony, but I cannot understand how anyone can weary of perpetual change and variety."

"They can, then. You just try it for yourself, my lord," said the tramp, with an ugly scowl.

"I wish I might try it!" exclaimed the young earl.

"I wish so, too," muttered the tramp.

"See here, Gow," said Lord Hawkewood, suddenly, and good-naturedly. "If you really would like to leave your wandering life and settle down, I think I can do something for you. You have a good common education, and—the master of my charity school is about to leave us to take an usher's place in Penzance. You may succeed him, if you like. The salary is fifty pounds a year, with a cottage furnished, and a garden, rent free."

"All under the vicar! No, I thank you, my lord. I will call no man master. The vicar and I would never get on. Besides, I don't like to be tied down to hours, my lord. I thank you all the same," replied Gow, with a disagreeable laugh.

"Well, Gow, I am sorry the suggestion does not suit you, but if there should be anything I could do for you at any time, I hope you will let me know it."

"Thank you, my lord, but I do not think there will be."

"Here, Ham, take this for old acquaintance' sake," said the earl, pressing a five-pound note into the hand of Gow, who closed his fingers upon it with a bow and a growl.

"And—come closer, Ham. Listen!" whispered the earl.

The tramp drew to his side and bent down.

"Stay about here until night—until late at night or early in the morning, and then, when all the guests are gone, and all the household is quiet, you come to the servants' entrance and ask for me."

"Yes, my lord."

"My valet will be there to admit you, and will bring you to my room, and you shall tell me something about your travels, for I know they must have been out of the course of commonplace tours."

"I should think so, my lord," laughed the man.

"Do not forget," added the young gentleman, as he moved off.

"All right, my lord," answered the tramp, pulling his dark elf locks by way of a bow, and snarling as he muttered:

"Fine to be me, is it?—a homeless, friendless, penniless, nameless ragamuffin, who never had a father or a mother

as he knows of, and never can tell where his next meal or bed is to come from! And he, an earl, with a rent roll of fifty thousand pounds a year, and all the beauties of the shire at his feet, no doubt! And yet—and yet—the old woman at Demondike says that we are brothers! Maybe so! 'All men are brethren,' for that matter, though the wealthy and prosperous seem to disallow their relationship to the poor and unfortunate! Heigh-ho! I shall wait upon my noble brother to-night, and see what he wants of me, and—what I can make out of him!"

With these words Ham Gow moved off to join a set of farm laborers who, with their wives and children, were feasting on bread and cheese, beef and beer, in one of the many tents.

Meanwhile the young earl walked toward the house, bowing and smiling, on the right and left, to the men in smock frocks and the women in smart gowns, who bowed or courtesied to him as he passed.

Near the house he met a tall, stout, heavy, gray-haired man, in a long, black frock coat all the way down to his heels, and a black velvet skull cap on his round head.

This was, of course, Dr. Paul Laude.

"Ah, my lord! You should not neglect your guests so long," began the doctor, who usually greeted his pupil with a criticism or a rebuke.

"I have just come from among my guests, sir," retorted the young man, turning and waving his hand toward the multitude of people whom he had left in the grounds.

The doctor followed the indication of his ward's hand, and shrugged his shoulders as he answered:

"Ah! them. That is all very well, as far as it goes; but you have other and more important guests, my lord, who have done us the honor to accept our invitations, and have come here to celebrate your natal day. Your cousin, Lewis Manton, is here in response to my invitation."

"He here! And at your bidding, Dr. Laude! I am very much astonished! You knew, sir, that my late father detested the very name of that false family, as he had every reason to do!" exclaimed the young earl, in a tone of indignant remonstrance such as he had never before ventured to use in speaking to his tutor, for whom the

habit of reverential submission that had been formed in his earliest childhood had clung to him ever since.

"Your father, my young friend, had, or supposed he had, good reason for hating the elder Lewis Manton; but he has followed his foe to the other world. This young man is his grandson, who never did either your father or yourself an injury. He is, besides, your cousin and your heir presumptive. In giving this birthday ball in honor of your nineteenth anniversary, and in bidding the principal county families to the place, I could not in decency omit him, your nearest, I may say your only kinsman," replied the doctor, with great gravity and dignity.

"I do not like him! I do not want him here!" exclaimed the young man, with his fine, pale face flushing.

"It is time this family feud had ceased. I thought so, and I held out the olive branch to Lewis, and he has taken it kindly."

"I am very sorry for it. I wish you had consulted me before taking so important a step."

"Did I not do so, and did you not particularly request me to use my own judgment concerning this fête?" demanded the doctor.

"It is true; but I could not have supposed that you would ask Lewis Manton here."

"Do you consider, Lord Hawkewood, that although you are the earl and the proprietor, yet that Lewis Manton is your heir presumptive, who, in case of your death, unmarried, would succeed to your title and estates, and in case of your death before your majority would also inherit all your personal property?" severely demanded the doctor.

"I do, but I fail to see why that should be a recommendation of him to my favor or a reason why I should have to receive him here," laughed the young man.

"Not a special recommendation to your favor, perhaps, but a very special reason why you should invite him to your house, when he lives so near. It is a matter of etiquette—a matter of courtesy—that must be observed, my lord! That must be, lest it should be said that you bear your cousin and heir presumptive, Lewis Manton, an unworthy grudge for the position he holds toward you and the bare possibility of his succeeding you. For the reasons stated

I have extended the right hand of fellowship to Lewis Manton, and he has received it. He has already arrived. I hope you will welcome him amicably."

"I will meet my guests politely, however I may disapprove of them personally," replied the young earl, as they entered the Hall.

Only the dinner guests—about twenty in all—had yet arrived.

And these were in their dressing rooms.

The earl and the doctor entered the drawing room—a long, lofty apartment, upholstered in light-blue velvet and ivory, with windows draped in lace and satin and walls covered with mirrors and choice pictures.

Open fires of sea coal were burning in the large, steel grates at each end of the room.

No one was present when the two gentlemen entered.

The doctor took up his position on the rug, with his back to the fire, and the earl threw himself languidly into an easy-chair.

The first to join them was a young man of about five-and-twenty years of age, with a tall figure, fair complexion, light-gray eyes, and sandy hair and whiskers, and whom the doctor immediately presented to the earl as "Mr. Lewis Manton, of Manton Manor."

The newcomer bowed low and was received politely by the young earl.

He seemed a very commonplace young gentleman, without any distinctive attributes—though a phrenologist might have viewed the flat, broad shape of the head with much disfavor as indicating a great lack of moral and religious principles and a great preponderance of animal and selfish instincts, and decided that this young gentleman of wealth and reputation, of elegant appearance and accomplished manners, was in himself neither good nor safe.

After a few moments entered the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors and their beautiful daughter, Lady Volante Belle Isle.

The duke was a tall, stout, florid man of forty years, with fiery-red hair and whiskers and bright, blue eyes.

The duchess was a pretty, plump brunette of medium height, with a rich complexion and dark-brown hair and

dark-gray eyes. She wore a handsome evening dress of garnet-colored velvet, finished with point lace about the low corsage and short sleeves, a diadem of diamonds on her dark hair, and earrings, necklace, brooch, and bracelets of the same peerless jewels.

The Lady Volante was the beauty of Cornwall and the belle of London.

She had been presented to the queen, and then had been brought out into society only during the season which had just closed. She had refused many most eligible offers of marriage, and had returned to the country hand free, if not heart whole.

Not heart whole; yet certainly as heart whole as she had gone. No one in London had disturbed the peace of her

"Maiden meditations, fancy free."

But gossip whispered that her heart, even from childhood, had been given to the melancholy young recluse of Hawke Hall, whom she had never seen except at church, whom she had never spoken to in her life, and who, if the truth must be told, thought no more of her than he did of her grandfather the archbishop—the young lady came on her mother's side from ecclesiastical ancestry.

She was a lovely brunette, of medium height and perfect form and features, with a rich and blooming complexion, fine, silky, dark-brown hair, curling lightly all around her head, and large, dark-gray eyes full of life and light and mischief! She wore a dress of fine, light, floating, cloud-like lace over a delicate rose-colored silk, made low on the bosom and short in the sleeves, and pearl ornaments on her beautiful neck and arms.

As the ducal party came into the room Dr. Laude advanced with great ceremony and conducted them to a sofa at the upper end.

When they were seated he brought up his ward, the young Earl of Hawkewood, and presented him first to the duchess, then to the Lady Volante, and lastly to the duke.

This presenting the host to the guests was reversing the usual order of things, in honor of age, rank, and womanhood, and it seemed good in the eyes of the worthy doctor.

The duchess received the young earl's bow with great courtesy and friendliness.

The Lady Volante's rich damask cheek deepened in its tint, and her long, thick, black lashes fell over her dark eyes. She returned his deep obeisance with a silent bow.

The duke shook hands with his young host, congratulated him on his natal day, and hoped that they might be better friends and neighbors henceforth than they had been hitherto.

The next arrivals were Mr., Mrs., and Miss Ball, of Bowling Downs; and never were people more appropriately named.

Mr. Ball was a little, round-bodied, bullet-headed, black-haired man of fifty; Mrs. Ball a little, round-bodied, black-haired, rosy-cheeked woman of forty-five.

How this dumpling pair ever came to have such a fine, tall, superb, imperial beauty as Olive Ball for a daughter is a mystery that can only be solved by the supposition that some of their ancestors must have been handsome giants.

Olive Ball was five feet seven inches in stature, and was plump in proportion to her height, with a full, finely rounded form, well-set head, covered with soft, fine, heavy, black hair, too lazy to curl, but lying in thick bands around her low, broad forehead; with a round, cream-colored face, straight, short nose, large, full, well-shaped lips, and full, well-curved chin, throat, and bosom.

She had large, soft, sleepy black eyes, half veiled by long, thick black lashes, and arched by heavy black brows. She wore a rich black velvet dress, with a low bodice and short sleeves—all trimmed with a narrow edge of fine white lace. This dress, though it was rather too matronly for a young, unmarried woman, yet certainly set off the large, well-rounded, beautiful bosom and arms to the best advantage.

The voice belonging to the Ball temperament—the voice that was fat and unctuous in the father and mother, was rich, rolling, and melodious in the daughter—so melodious that there was a sensuous pleasure in hearing her speak—even though she did call father "fawther," and pride, "proide."

Enough of Olive Ball. Like Volante Belle Isle, she had her part to play in this strange family history, and that part began this night.

Other guests assembled, and then dinner was announced.

The young earl led the duchess to the table. It was his duty to pay this mark of respect to the lady of the highest rank in the room.

Dr. Paul Laude took in Lady Volante. The duke offered his arm to Mrs. Ball, Mr. Manton to Miss Olive Ball, and other guests paired as suited themselves, and so they went in to dinner.

The young host took the head of the table, with the Duchess of Grand Manors on one side and Mrs. Ball on the other side.

He did not care in the least. At that period of his life and experience he would as willingly have been flanked by the dowagers as by anybody else.

The dinner was a long, formal, and tedious affair, but it came to an end at length, and the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, where, a few minutes later, they were joined by the gentlemen, and tea and coffee were served.

Meanwhile the guests who had been invited to the ball in the evening began to arrive.

A suite of rooms occupying one entire wing of the house had been thrown open and prepared for the music and dancing.

Very soon after the young host took his place the rooms began rapidly to fill.

"You should take Lady Volante out and open the ball with her," whispered Dr. Laude to the young earl, when all the guests were supposed to be assembled and the musicians were tuning up their instruments preparatory to playing a quadrille.

Lord Hawkewood obediently left his tutor's side and went languidly up to the young lady in question, and asked the honor of her hand for the first dance.

She arose and placed the tips of her kid-gloved fingers on his coat sleeves and he led her to the head of a set that was then soon completed.

Mr. Manton and Miss Olive Ball were their *vis-à-vis*.

Other sets formed and the dancing commenced.

Once "in the turn of the flying dance," the young earl glanced at his partner and noticed that she had laughing, dark eyes.

That glance was quite accidental; the next one was on purpose; but it was not so successful as the first—the mischievous eyes were veiled under ivory-white lids fringed with long, black, curly lashes that lay like shadows on the damask cheeks that glowed with consciousness under his gaze.

For the first time in his life the young recluse of Hawke Hall was impressed by the beauty of a young woman.

His glances sought the lovely face in every whirl of the dance, and went sideways toward her while they stood still together waiting their turn.

But whenever she chanced to look up and catch him at this pastime, his eyes fell and his face flushed.

At the end of the quadrille he took her to her mother and stood mutely beside her until the waltz music began, and then he solicited her hand for the round dance and led her out again.

With his arm clasping her waist, with her hand resting on his shoulder, her head so near his breast that his face was brushed by the beautiful, perfumed dark hair—whirling around and around in measured cadences to the time of entrancing music, in that dreamy, bewildering, delicious waltz, Horace felt that he had never imagined the possibility of a heaven on earth like this!

Again, at the end of the dance, he took his partner to her mother, and stood mute and spellbound before her.

Then it was that Dr. Laude came slowly up to them and said, with dignified courtesy:

"Excuse me, dear duchess, I have a word to say to his lordship."

And with that he drew his ward's arm within his own and walked him off through the crowded rooms, saying, as they went:

"It is all very well, and just as it should be, your attentions to Lady Volante—so far. But there are other ladies in the room—Miss Olive Ball, for one—who have some claim upon you as their host. You must distribute your attentions. You must ask Miss Olive for the next waltz."

Horace impatiently shook off the doctor's arm. He was growing furious under this constant tutelage.

"I cannot ask Miss Olive Ball to waltz! I could not hold her up. I am not strong enough," he answered, with a mocking laugh.

"What nonsense! You must be a gentleman in your own house, my lord!" said the doctor, and he recaptured his ward's arm and led him up to Miss Ball.

Horace had nothing else to do but to bow and ask the honor, and so forth.

"Tell them to play 'The Broide's Durream.' It is a beautiful, easy waltz, not too fast," said Olive, in her rich voice, as she lazily arose and passed her plump arm through that of the young earl.

"The Bride's Dream" arose in low, soft, slowly swelling notes, and soon Horace and Olive were gliding around in the delicious melody of motion. He did not feel her weight, though his arm was around her waist and her hand was on his shoulder. Her touch seemed to mesmerize, soothe, and exalt him, and he was almost as happy as he had been in waltzing with Volante—in a different sort of paradise, to be sure, but still in a paradise.

So well pleased was he with his new partner that he would gladly have danced with her again had not the officious doctor, at the end of that waltz, marched him off to dance a quadrille with another young lady, who was neither a sparkling and enlivening beauty like Volante nor a sleepy and soothing one like Olive.

At twelve the supper rooms were opened, and continued open all the remainder of the night, so that the elder guests might refresh themselves with feeding and drinking, while the younger ones were dancing and waltzing away the small hours.

Dr. Laude was a free liver, so far as food and drink were concerned. You might know that by his size and complexion.

He spent the night from 12 M. to 2 A. M. in the supper rooms.

He took down successively the Duchess of Grand Manors, Mrs. Olive Ball, and other middle-aged or elderly ladies, and he kept each of them company at supper.

Lord Hawkewood took advantage of his mentor's absence by confining his attentions, for the remainder of the evening, to Lady Volante.

The ball broke up at half-past two.

All the company departed, except the few guests who had been invited to stay all night; these were the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors, the Lady Volante Belle Isle, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Ball, and Miss Olive Ball, and Mr. Lewis Manton.

When these last-mentioned guests had been shown to their several apartments and Dr. Laude had said his solemn good-night and retired, Lord Hawkewood passed into the library, which had not been opened to the inroad of visitors, and, therefore, was in perfect order, and he called a loitering footman and said:

"Send Delaplaine here."

The footman bowed and retired, and the valet entered the room.

"Has Gow been here?" demanded the earl.

"Yes, my lord."

"Where is he now?"

"In your lordship's dressing-room."

"When did he come?"

"About midnight, my lord."

"And you took him up to my room?"

"Not immediately, my lord. He made himself useful in the china and glass pantry during supper. I took him up at two o'clock, my lord."

"Quite right. Come to me in about fifteen minutes. I want you."

"Yes, my lord."

The earl took his bedroom candle and left the library, and went through the hall, where the footmen were engaged in putting out the lights, and so passed up the grand staircase.

The valet, Delaplaine, gazed after his master. The valet was a little, slender man of about thirty years of age, with a sallow complexion, and black hair and mustache, and small, black eyes. As he gazed, a strange expression came into his dark face, and he muttered:

"Bon! This night shall be my opportunity, and this tramp shall be my scapegoat! *Tres bon!"*

Meanwhile the young earl reached the head of the stairs, where the short wax candle that he carried dropped out of the socket of the silver bracket, fell to the ground and went out.

"Never mind," said the earl to himself. "I can find my way to my room without a light."

And he walked down the great upper hall, from which several passages diverged.

He entered a lofty archway on his left, and passed into what was called "The Bachelors' Corridor," where were situated his own handsome suite of apartments, Dr. Laude's private rooms, and the guest chambers to be appropriated to any bachelor visitor that might be staying in the house.

Lord Hawkewood, Dr. Laude, and Mr. Lewis Manton were now the only occupants.

As the young earl passed silently along the dark and thickly carpeted corridor a circumstances occurred that seemed singular at the time, and sinister as seen in the light of later events.

There was a dim lamp burning at the upper end of the corridor, and by its aid Lord Hawkewood saw, to his surprise, a man at his door apparently engaged in tampering with the lock.

He hurried to the spot and came suddenly and silently upon his cousin, Lewis Manton, who started and turned around.

Lord Hawkewood merely thought that a mistake had been made.

"This is not your room, Mr. Manton. Yours is two doors above," he said politely.

"Oh—ah—I beg pardon. The doors are all so much alike," replied the man.

"They are. Well, two doors above. You will not mistake again. On this same side, of course. Good-night," said Horace pleasantly.

"Good-night," returned the other.

A door opened from the opposite side, and Dr. Laude, in nightcap and wrapper, put his head out and inquired:

"What's the matter here?"

"Nothing, except that Mr. Manton mistook my room door for his own, and I have set him right."

"Oh!" exclaimed the doctor, as he disappeared and locked himself within his chamber.

Lord Hawkewood also entered his own proper apartment and closed the door.

Half an hour later all the doors and windows in the house were secured, all the lights were put out, and all the household had retired.

They slept the deep sleep of fatigue and repletion. No sound disturbed their profound repose.

Yet, while they slept, that fatal night,

"A deed of dreadful note"

was done in that house—a deed whose discovery in the morning would thrill the whole household and the whole community with its unexampled horror and unfathomable mystery.

CHAPTER III

HORROR AND MYSTERY

The night has been unruly,
And, as they say, lamentings heard i' the air—
Strange signs of death;
And prophesyings, with accents terrible,
Of dire combustion and confused events;
New hatched to the woeful time,
The obscure bird clamor'd the livelong night.
Some say the earth was feverous and did shake.

—SHAKESPEARE.

THE guests at Hawke Hall slept late on the morning after the birthnight ball. It was near noon before any of them were astir.

The Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors were the first to leave their apartment.

At the foot of the grand staircase they found the groom

of the chambers, a gray-haired servant in plain clothes, who respectfully led the way to the west wing of the house, which contained the family parlors, breakfast and dining rooms, library and study.

None of these apartments had been opened to guests on the preceding evening, and they were all, therefore, in a state of perfect order.

The groom of the chambers led the ducal pair to the breakfast room, where a fine sea coal fire took the chill from the September day, and where the table was laid for the morning meal.

"Shall I ring for breakfast, your grace?" inquired Pelton respectfully.

"N-n-o. How long will it be before the others are down, I wonder?" hesitated and inquired the duke.

"I really cannot say, your grace. But I would respectfully advise not to wait, your grace," replied the old man.

"No! Ring for the coffee," exclaimed the duchess peremptorily, for she was always ready for her breakfast or any other refreshment.

Mr. Pelton put his hand on the bell pull, but arrested his intended motion at the sight of Dr. Laude, who came in in his long, priestly black robe and his round skull cap.

"Good-morning, duke. Good-morning, madam. I crave your pardon for my late appearance," said the doctor, advancing with a bow, and then turning and standing on the rug, with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him.

"Oh, we have just come down, and we are only glad not to have to apologize for keeping anybody waiting," said the duke.

As he spoke the door opened and Mr., Mrs., and Miss Ball entered, closely followed by Lady Volante Belle Isle.

Mutual morning greetings were exchanged, and then the doctor said:

"We are all here except the two young gentlemen. I do not think we need wait for them. Times and manners are changed since I was young. It was unknown then for healthy young men to be sluggards. Pelton, ring for the coffee."

The groom of the chambers obeyed, and the old butler, Forbes, himself appeared with the tray.

"Ah! And here is Mr. Manton, also. Good-morning, young sir. I hope you have slept well?" said the doctor, addressing the last-named guest.

Lewis Manton bowed to the ladies present, and then turned and answered the doctor.

"Yes, thanks, I slept very well. Never woke until half an hour ago," said Lewis Manton, smiling.

Yet he did not look as if he had rested. His face was almost ghastly in its pallor.

"These late hours are not good for you, Mr. Manton. Have you seen your cousin this morning?" inquired the doctor, as the party seated themselves at the breakfast table.

"No. Has he not come down yet?" demanded the young gentleman, pausing in the act of taking a cup of coffee from the butler's hand.

"He has not, and it is disgraceful! Pelton!" exclaimed the old gentleman, turning to the groom of the chambers.

"Yes, sir," answered the latter, with a bow.

"Go up yourself, or send some one else, to see if Lord Hawkewood is up. Let him know that we are all assembled at breakfast, and would be glad to see his lordship at his earliest convenience," said the doctor, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Yes, sir," submissively replied the old servant, as he bowed and left the room.

"Try a slice of this venison steak on a chafing dish, duke. It is delicious, dressed so with red currant jelly. Forbes, serve his grace with a chafing dish and fresh coal. Well! What on earth is the matter?"

This impatient question was addressed to old Pelton, who had burst into the room with a face full of mute, agonizing horror.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!" was all that the old man could gasp in reply.

"Speak, idiot!" cried the doctor, while his companions at the breakfast table gazed on the panic-stricken old man in surprise and curiosity.

"Oh, sir! My lord! my lord!" groaned Pelton, wringing

his hands and tottering back until he fell and leaned against the wall of the room.

"What about my lord, you blockhead? Is he ill from last night's doings? I shouldn't wonder at all if he were. What ails him?" impatiently demanded the doctor.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir! It is worse than that! Worse than ill! Oh! oh! Oh, Heaven!" cried the old servant, as the tears now burst forth and streamed down his ashen face.

"Worse—worse than that! What do you mean? Speak at once!" exclaimed the doctor, now thoroughly alarmed, as he started up from his chair.

But the old servant sank, sobbing convulsively, to the floor.

All the party at the breakfast table now arose and gathered around the collapsed figure on the floor.

The duke, who alone of all the company seemed to have his wits about him, went to the sideboard, poured out a glass of cognac brandy and brought it to the prostrate man, saying:

"Here! Take and drink this, and try to collect your faculties."

The poor old man obeyed, took the glass in his shaking hands and put it to his lips and emptied it at a gulp. That was the way of his class in drinking.

"Now, then, tell us what is amiss with your master," said the duke, as he handed the empty glass to the butler, who stood there staring with wonder.

"What is the matter with his lordship?" demanded the doctor.

"Oh, sir! Oh, your grace!" cried the unhappy man, recovering his voice under the influence of the stimulant, but still weeping and wringing his hands in mortal anguish.

"Speak, you intolerable fool! What has happened to Lord Hawkewood?" abruptly demanded Mr. Ball, who now opened his mouth for the first time.

"Oh, sir—oh, your grace! He is dead! dead! dead!" gasped the old man, dropping his head and wringing his hands.

The silence of a sudden, stupefying panic fell on the company for an instant, and then every voice echoed the fatal word in different tone:

"Dead!" "Dead!" "Dead!"

"Murdered, gentlemen—murdered!" shrieked the old man, beside himself with horror and despair.

"Murdered!" roared the men in chorus, as, with one accord they turned and hurried toward the great hall and up the grand staircase.

"Murdered!" whispered the ladies present, in hushed tones, with pallid cheeks and sickening hearts, as they sank, each one, upon the nearest seat.

Meanwhile the gentlemen, led by the duke, hastened up to the bedchamber of the young earl, threw open the door and entered the room.

What did they see?

Only at first a dimly lighted, spacious chamber, upholstered in black walnut and crimson satin, with heavy crimson curtains at the lofty windows and around the canopied bed.

Dr. Laude, with a pale face and a slight, muttered apology, pushed past the others and hurried to the bed, parted the curtains, looked upon the still form lying there, and shrank back, white as a sheet, exclaiming:

"Great Heaven! It is true!"

The Duke of Grand Manors, Mr. Ball, Lewis Manton, and several of the upper servants of the house, who had followed the doctor to the chamber of death, now crowded around the bed, with exclamations of astonishment.

There lay the rigid form of the young man, cold, white, and still, with a ghastly wound across his forehead.

"Gracious Heaven! Who could have done this?" cried the duke.

"Have the doors of the house closed, Dr. Laude. Suffer no one to leave the premises until there is an investigation of this atrocious crime! The house must be put into the hands of the police!" said Mr. Ball, who was in the commission of the peace.

"We must send immediately for Dr. Ellis. Life may not yet be extinct," replied the doctor, as soon as he could recover from his panic; and he bent again over the body and laid his hand upon the icy brow.

"Oh, my dear sir!" muttered the duke, in a tone of grave expostulation against such an absurd hypothesis.

"I must beg, Dr. Laude, that you will not lay a finger on the murdered man until the coroner has seen him," urged Mr. Ball.

"A physician must see him, sir!" groaned the tutor, who was still half stupefied with consternation and anguish, and he turned to the groom of the chambers and said hurriedly:

"Pelton, send a messenger on horseback for Dr. Ellis. Tell him to follow and find the doctor wherever he may be and bring him here forthwith! Hasten!"

The distracted old servant ran out of the room to do his errand.

Mr. Ball turned around and addressed his companions, saying:

"Gentlemen, you must really pardon me if I ask you all to withdraw from this room, which, in my official capacity as a justice of the peace, I am about to close and seal until the arrival of the coroner and the police, whom I shall proceed immediately to summon."

The shuddering men withdrew from the chamber.

The magistrate locked the door.

"Forbes," said Lewis Manton, as they went downstairs, "be good enough to bring me a glass of brandy into the breakfast room."

"Yes, my lord," answered the butler, touching his forehead respectfully. "What brand does your lordship prefer?"

"Otard; and be quick about it!" answered Lewis Manton.

Dr. Laude had started at hearing the young man addressed as "my lord," and he had stared for an instant; but then he quickly recollected himself, and muttered:

"Good Heaven! it is true! Lewis Manton, the sometime heir presumptive of the title and estates, has succeeded, and he is the seventeenth Earl of Hawkewood; and the servants are quick to remember it, and to give him his new title. Ah, Heaven! the very worst fears of the late earl are realized, and the earldom has fallen to an alien and an enemy!"

Thus groaning in the spirit, he followed the guests into the breakfast room, but the interrupted breakfast was not resumed.

Lady Volante Belle Isle lay upon the sofa, white and trembling.

The other ladies were near the girl, bathing her temples with cologne, Olive Ball holding a viniagrette to her nostrils.

The confirmation of the terrible news had already reached them through the servants, who had preceded the gentlemen to the breakfast room.

"This shock has been too much for Volante. We must get her home immediately," said the duchess. Then, turning to Lewis Manton, she graciously inquired:

"Will your lordship kindly give directions that my carriage shall be ordered?"

The new earl bowed, and touched the bell; and to the servant who answered it he said:

"See that her grace the Duchess of Grand Manors' carriage is brought around."

The footman bowed and withdrew.

"Ah, Heaven!" sighed the doctor, who felt his "occupation" gone. "How ready is this world to forget the setting in the rising sun! 'The king is dead! Long live the king!' in the same breath. I can give no more orders here."

Mr. Ball had meantime taken a good-sized notebook from his pocket, and was now busily writing in it. When he had finished, he tore out the page, folded and directed it, and, turning to Dr. Laude, said:

"Doctor, shall I trouble you to send this by a servant to a police station?"

"Sir," said the doctor, with dignity, "I have no longer the privilege of issuing commands in this house. But Lord Hawkewood here will, no doubt, see that your wishes are carried out."

"By George, they must be carried out! I am a magistrate, engaged in the discharge of my official duty," pompously exclaimed the round, little man. "Here is a young nobleman found murdered in his bed——"

At this moment a servant entered the room and announced:

"The Duchess of Grand Manors' carriage."

The duchess assisted Lady Volante Belle Isle to rise, and both ladies turned to leave the room.

But Mr. Ball interrupted them by saying to the former:

"Your grace will pardon me, but no one can be permitted to leave the house until the coroner's inquest has sat."

"What, sir? Is it possible that you would detain myself and my daughter here?" demanded the indignant duchess.

"By no means, your grace!" the little, rotund magistrate hastened to say, with his round face as red as a tomato. "By no means; yet it is absolutely required that everyone here present should remain until after the inquest."

"It is true, madam. Mr. Ball is quite right," said the duke gently, as he gave his arm to his half-fainting daughter to support her back to her sofa.

"What a horrid nuisance to have to stay in this awful house! But if we cannot go home we must go to our rooms. Volante must go to bed and be nursed," replied the duchess.

The duke then turned his steps toward the door and led his daughter from the breakfast parlor, up the stairs to her own apartment, followed closely by the duchess.

Lewis Manton, as the new Earl of Hawkewood, took upon himself the direction of all affairs not strictly within the province of the magistrate.

A detachment of police arrived at the hall early in the afternoon and took possession of the house, placing guards at every door to prevent the departure of anyone from the premises.

They were followed by a great crowd from Hawkeville and the surrounding country, who had been drawn to the spot by the news of the murder.

Prominent among the people were Penn, the little, red-haired locksmith; Tree, the long, lank, swarthy tanner, and Proddy, the gray old cobbler.

These were almost overwhelmed with grief and dismay at the sudden and terrible taking off of their young feudal lord.

"And before he had a chance to get married and leave an heir to come after him—and he the last of his line—the last of the Hawkes of Hawkewood!" they said over and over to each other and to their neighbors, with the senseless reiteration of men who have few ideas and much loquacity.

Being without the fear of a libel suit before their eyes, having nothing, indeed, to risk or lose in damages, these

poor men expressed their opinions with much more freedom than their betters would have dared to do.

"Durn it all, it were that there Lewis Manton wot done it! It were him, and none other! Which being of the next heir in case the young airl died unmarried, would come in for the title and all the estates—durn him! It were him wot done it!" said Proddy, the little, gray cobbler, taking his stumpy pipe from his mouth while he spoke.

"I dunnot think so. It might be to his advantage for the young lord to die unmarried, so to speak; but I dunnot think he would risk killing of him, like," objected Tree, the tanner, running his long, rough, brown fingers through his black elf locks.

"Who else could ha' done it, then?" demanded Penn, holding a pipe suspended between his finger and thumb.

The tanner paused and looked from one to the other mysteriously, and then whispered:

"Ham Gow, the tramp—him it were wot done the deed."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried the two others, in a chorus of dissent. "Ham Gow is as honest a fellow as ever drawed the breath of life! Ham Gow, quotha? Oh!"

"Yes, Ham Gow! And if so be he didn't do it, he'll be hung for it all the same, mind you! Why, just look at it! Don't you mind the young airl made a 'pointment with that wagabone to meet him last night alone in his bedroom arter all the quality had gone to bed? Didn't we hear the 'pointment made with our own years?"

"We did," sighed the old cobbler, shaking his gray head sorrowfully.

"And didn't I hear that wagrant promise to go and keep that 'pointment? And didn't I hear that tramp a-growling to himself, as he walked off, about wot he would get outen the young airl afore he was done with him? I did that! Telly wot, mates! I wouldn't wonder if there wurn't a great robbery committed as well as a murder, and Ham Gow hadn't made off with the booty. There!"

Little Proddy dropped down on a rustic seat under the tree where they stood, and shuffled his feet and shook his head, sighing:

"I'm werry sorry to hear that! I'm uncommon sorry

to hear that! I'd a heap ruther it be Muster Lewis Manton wot killed the airl nor Ham Gow."

"But why?" demanded the locksmith and the tanner in a breath.

The old cobbler took his pipe from his mouth, into which he had just placed it, stared at the questioners in surprise for a moment, and then answered:

"Why, bekase I like Ham Gow. And let alone that. If the young airl had to be murdered, and it was his fate, I'd a heap ruther a gentleman should be hung for him nor a poor, low wagabone! I think it's jue to the young airl as a gentleman should be hung for him. So I shall just give my v'ice in favor of Muster Lewis Manton being of the murderer. It's a more befitting the quality of the airl," concluded Proddy, replacing the pipe in his mouth and smoking complacently, even while his eyes were still wet with tears for his slaughtered lord.

"There be summat in wot you say, Mr. Proddy—there be," earnestly acknowledged the tanner, nodding his hirsute black head sagaciously.

"Telly wot!" exclaimed the little, red-haired locksmith, in a thin, piping voice. "It's nyther the gentleman nor yet the tramp wot done this bloody deed. The gentleman wouldn't demean hisself to resk sich a thing as hanging, and Ham Gow would no more ha' done it nor me! It wurn't nyther of them two!"

"Who was it, then?" demanded the old cobbler.

"Ay, that's the p'int. Who was it?" added the tanner.

"It was jest that furring French wally-de-sham. And a great sham he be—that Muster Dillyplin."

"O-h-h!" exclaimed his two hearers, incredulously.

"You don't believe me? Well, who was like to have been the last in the room of the young airl, even after the tramp had tuk his leave? Why, o' course, the wally-de-sham—Dillyplin. There!"

"That's so!" murmured his hearers, musingly.

"Ay, it is; and, moreover, mates, I hearn Mr. Moss, the head gardener, say as the wally-de-sham is missing."

"Wot!" cried both the other men in a breath.

"The wally-de-sham, Mr. Dillyplin, is a-missing, and can't be found nowhere," solemnly repeated the locksmith.

"Never!" cried the tanner.

"Who says it?" asked the cobbler.

"Mr. Moss, the gardener, I tell you. And they are a-looking for that wally-de-sham up hill and down dale, and can't find him nowheres," added the locksmith.

"Well, then that settles it!" muttered the tanner.

"I'm feared it does," sighed the cobbler, shaking his head.

"And that wally-de-sham done that bloody deed," added Tree.

"I'm feared he did. I was in hopes, since it were done, as a gentleman might be hung for the airl. It was jue to his rank, so to speak."

"It were," assented both his hearers.

The men were here interrupted by the arrival of a policeman, who said:

"You three must come up to the house. You will be wanted to give evidence before the inquest."

"But we don't know nothing about it!" exclaimed Penn.

"We wa'n't here—none on us!" added Tree.

"But, anyways, I want to give in my evidence, as I believe it were Musther Lewis Manton wot done the dreffle deed, and if it wurn't him it ought to ha' been, for it stands to reason, since the airl was murdered, a gentleman ought to be hung for him. It's no more'n wot's jue to his rank. I'm a-gwine 'long of you, p'liceman," said Proddy, rising with difficulty to follow the officer.

They passed through a crowd of their neighbors, who shrank from them in horror, and whispered among themselves that these men were "had up for the murder."

But the true state of the case was this: One of the first acts of the police, on taking possession of the house, was to make a thorough search of the late Lord Hawkewood's room.

There they found, both in what was present, and from what was absent, certain clues to the supposed murderer.

There had been an extensive robbery; the late earl's watch, pocketbook, diamond studs, and diamond sleeve buttons were missing. The iron safe was open, and its contents gone.

A small quantity of clothing had also disappeared.

And the absence of all these articles seemed to supply the motive for the murder, and that motive, robbery.

In the place of the missing property was found one fatal witness—a woolen scarf known to have been worn by the tramp, Ham Gow, on the afternoon of the preceding day at the fête.

The servants were called together and closely questioned. They all identified the red woolen scarf as the property of Ham Gow, the tramp, which was worn by him on the premises.

A footman said that he had admitted Gow to the house at midnight, by the prevoius directions of his master. Another footman said that he had let the ramp out at five o'clock in the morning. A gardener's boy volunteered the information that he had heard the appointment made between his late master and the tramp to meet that night in his lordship's chamber.

Being questioned by the sergeant of police as to who else had heard this appointment made, he answered that he thought Penn, the locksmith; Tree, the tanner, and Proddy, the cobbler, had heard it, because they were all three near at hand.

A policeman was then dispatched to find the three cronies, and after an absence of twenty minutes returned to the house, bringing them.

In answer to the questions of the sergeant, they all three, each in his turn, admitted that they had been present in the grounds about sunset on the preceding afternoon, and had heard the appointment made between Lord Hawkewood and Ham Gow to meet in his lordship's room that night after the guests should have retired. That was all they really knew about the matter.

Old Proddy began to declare his private and individual opinion that Mr. Lewis Manton had committed the crime, and ought to be forthwith executed therefor; but the sergeant ordered the old man to be silent.

They were all detained as witnesses before the inquest.

"Where is his lordship's valet, Albert Delaplaine?" next inquired the sergeant.

"If you please, sir, we do not know. Mr. Dillyplin has

not been seen here since last night," answered the groom of the chambers.

"What!" exclaimed the sergeant, turning suddenly upon the speaker.

"If you please, sir, his lordship's gentleman, Mr. Dillyplin, has not been seen since last night," repeated Pelton, slowly and emphatically.

"This is a most important fact! Why were we not told of it before?" inquired the sergeant, in as much disturbance as a self-contained police officer ever betrays.

"If you please, sir, you never asked, and I thought we was only here to answer questions."

This conversation, which took place in the upper hall near the sealed bedchamber of the murdered man, was interrupted by the appearance of a messenger, who announced that the coroner had arrived and wished to see the sergeant of police.

The assembled servants were ordered to remain where they were, and the sergeant went down to see the coroner, whom he found in the lower hall in conversation with Mr. Ball, the magistrate, who was staying in the house, and Dr. Ellis, the family physician, who had just arrived upon the scene, overcome with the news of the night's mysterious tragedy.

Together the four men went up to the chamber of horror to view the body of the murdered man.

No change had passed over the corpse since the discovery in the morning.

It lay there cold, stiff, white, with the deep, ghastly wound in the forehead and the coagulated blood settled on the pillow around the marble face.

Dr. Ellis, scarcely able to command his emotions, proceeded to make a cursory examination of the case.

With a sponge and basin of hot water, procured from the adjoining dressing-room, he carefully washed the clotted blood from the wound on the forehead, showing a fracture of the skull, which he pronounced to have been produced by a blow from a blunt instrument and to have been the immediate cause of death.

A further and more careful search was made in the room,

and the fatal weapon was found—a blunt hammer, with the letters H. G. rudely cut on the handle.

"Ham Gow," muttered the physician, as he examined the initials.

"The body must be removed to the ground floor. What room can be placed at our disposal for the inquest?" inquired the coroner of the physician.

"I will ask his lordship, and let you know," replied the latter.

The three gentlemen then left the room, locking the door after them and carrying off the most significant witness of the crime that they had yet found—the blunt hammer, stained with blood and bearing on its handle the initials of the luckless tramp.

The magistrate and the physician went to seek the new Lord Hawkewood to consult him concerning the room in which the inquest might be held.

They found his lordship in the library alone, seated by a writing-table with a decanter of brandy and a wineglass before him.

His lordship had evidently been drinking freely—drinking more than was good for him, as the two elder gentlemen saw with as much surprise as regret, for Lewis Manton had never been addicted to intemperance.

However, the magistrate and the physician ascribed this indulgence to the state of excitement into which the young gentleman had been thrown by the suddenness of his cousin's shocking death and of his own unexpected elevation to the title and estates.

"We have come to speak of the inquest, my lord," began Mr. Ball; but he was instantly interrupted by the earl, who lifted his hand deprecatingly, exclaiming:

"I beg you will not speak of it to me at all! If I am to be summoned as a witness I will attend when the time comes—though, in point of fact, I know nothing about this horrible affair. Until then, leave me in peace."

"It is about the room in which the inquest may be held, my lord. It should be some room on the ground floor," suggested Mr. Ball.

"Go to Dr. Laude. Tell him I sent you to ask his ad-

vice. He has been here nearly twenty years, and knows the house. Go to him."

The two gentlemen left the library and went in search of the venerable doctor, whom they at length found in his own den—opposite the chamber of death.

They told him their business.

He roused himself from his lethargy of grief to tell them that the long-disused justice room would be the proper place for the inquest to be held.

The two gentlemen left the chamber to give orders to that effect.

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

Lost! Out of my keeping!
Gone, beyond recovery!—KNOWLES.

But what are these grave thoughts to thee?
For restlessly, impatiently,
Thou strivest, strugglest to be free—
Thy only dream is liberty,
Thou carest not how or where!—LONGFELLOW.

THE old justice room then was prepared for the inquest. The body of the murdered earl was laid out in state upon the table in its midst.

Another table, placed at right angles with this one, at the upper end of the hall, and covered with a black cloth, was furnished with writing materials for the accommodation of the coroner and such officers of the law as should attend the inquest.

Benches on each side the longer table on which the body lay were placed for the jury.

This jury was composed of some of the more intelligent and respectable among the farmers and tradesmen of the neighborhood—all of whom were tenants of the late earl.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, however, before

the coroner took his seat, with a clerk on one side of him and a bailiff on the other.

The jurymen were sworn in and took their places.

Near the table at which the coroner and his assistants were seated stood several comfortable armchairs, which were soon occupied by Mr. Ball and Dr. Laude, and later on by the Duke of Grand Manors and Dr. Ellis.

The new Earl of Hawkewood was not present at the opening of the inquest.

The room was soon filled with an eager crowd, composed of gentlemen from the neighborhood and tenants and laborers from the estate.

The first witness called was the groom of the chambers, who had discovered the murder.

Having been duly sworn, he testified that his name was Adam Pelton and his age fifty years; that he was born on the estate and had been in the service of the family since the age of fifteen, when he had entered it as page to the then Countess of Hawkewood.

He had last seen his master alive on the night of the first of September, or, to speak more correctly, on the morning of that same second of September, at about three o'clock, going upstairs to bed.

That he himself had neither seen nor heard of his late lordship again until about twelve o'clock that day, when all the guests being assembled at breakfast, he was ordered by Dr. Laude to go up and call the young earl.

That he had gone to his lordship's room and rapped softly; getting no response, rapped loudly; receiving no answer, and finding the door slightly ajar, he had gone in and approached the bed, and called gently; failing to wake his lordship, he had stooped over him to see if he were very sound asleep—and—had—then—discovered——

Here the voice of the witness broke down, and he sobbed convulsively.

Time was given him to recover, and after some minutes he resumed:

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but I have knowed my lord since he was—was born, all right along up to this time, and his fate has broke my heart," he said, in a tone of humble apology.

And then he went on to describe the manner in which he had found the murdered earl, and had given the alarm to his friends.

One of the jurors inquired whether the witness knew of any person who had any grudge against his lordship.

The witness answered, extra judicially, as it were:

"Why, law! No, Farmer Perry! I don't believe no one had no more grudge against my lord nor you nor me have! He was that well-beloved as I believed there ain't a man on the estate as wouldn't ha' sooner died for him nor have killed him. Besides which, there was the robbery. That shows what the murder was done for. Some thief from a long distance must ha' got into the house and hid himself in his lordship's chamber, and killed his lordship to prevent his lordship from giving the alarm, and then gone off with all the waluables."

"You are not here to instruct the jury, witness, but only to tell what you know of this case," said the coroner.

"I know I ain't, Mr. Bucks," replied Pelton, addressing that officer ex-officially, as was his custom. "I know I ain't; but when a man like Farmer Perry asks a foolish question I am to answer it, ain't I?"

"You may sit down," said the coroner.

And Adam Pelton left the stand.

The next witnesses called in succession were his grace the Duke of Grand Manors, Mr. Ball, and Dr. Laude—all of whom corroborated the latter portion of Adam Pelton's testimony, and described the condition in which the body of the murdered earl was found.

Then Dr. Ellis testified to having made an examination of the corpse ,explaining the cause of death, and said that as the wound was an external one no autopsy was necessary.

The policeman who searched the room described its condition after the murder. The safe, cabinet, and drawers of the late earl had been rifled of their contents; yet no locks had been broken, not even the lock of the chamber door, which was found with its key inside.

Several of the servants testified to the fact that Ham Gow, the tramp, had come to the house at midnight, saying that he did so by the orders of the young lord, and

that he was admitted by his lordship's valet, who had been called into consultation as to whether Gow should be permitted to stay, and who declared that his lordship had commanded that he—Gow—should, on his arrival, be shown up to his lordship's room.

That Gow had made himself useful for a few hours in helping to rinse glasses in the china room during supper, and had then been conducted to the private apartments of the earl to wait.

Adam Pelton, re-called and questioned, said that he did not hear the late earl say anything about having an appointment with Ham Gow in his lordship's room or elsewhere, and, in truth, he never even heard his lordship mention the name of Ham Gow.

Several other servants testified to having seen Delaplaine, the valet, enter his lordship's room about half-past three o'clock in the morning, as they were going up together to their own sleeping-rooms in the attic, and to having missed him ever since.

Messrs. Penn, Tree, and Proddy were sworn and examined in turn, and testified to having overheard the appointment made between the late Earl of Hawkewood and Ham Gow, the tramp, to meet in his lordship's chamber that night after the ball should be over and the guests departed.

Upon the fact of this appointment all three of the men agreed. In addition to this, however, Tree, the tanner, testified that he overheard the tramp growling to himself that if he kept the appointment he would make something out of that job before all was done.

As for Proddy, the cobbler, he could scarcely be kept in bounds.

After he had described the appointment made in his hearing, he burst forth with these words:

"But, gentlemen and the honorable and worshipful parlyment, don't let wot I have said set you ag'in Ham Gow, wot is as honest a poor man as there is in the world, and wot had no call to up and kill my lord—because why? Because he was like to get more by my lord's life than by his death. No, my lords and gentlemen of the jury; you

must look to the party wot was to be beneficked by his lordship's death. Him it was wot done the deed."

Here Mr. Proddy was rebuked by the coroner, who proceeded to admonish him that he was not on the stand to give his opinion, but to tell the facts within his knowledge.

"W'ich I'm a-doing on, your honors and your worships; for it is my knowledge to know as it is jue to his lordship that a born gentleman should be hung for his lordship. My lord wasn't no common man, your reverences! My lord was Airl o' Hawkewood and a Pare o' the Rem! And w'en he's found murdered in his bed it stands to reason a gentleman should be hung for him."

"The man is an idiot! Stand down, witness!" said the coroner.

Old Proddy slunk away, muttering:

"I knows wot I knows."

Search was ordered to be made for the missing valet, but it proved unavailing.

All the witnesses having been examined, the room was cleared, that the jury might deliberate on the verdict.

It was now growing dark, so that the great chandelier in the drawing-room was ordered to be lighted.

The jury deliberated in the inquest room with closed doors. The crowd outside gathered into groups and talked over the tragedy while waiting for the verdict.

It was ten o'clock before the verdict was rendered that:

"The deceased, Horace Charles Edward Hawke, sixteenth Earl of Hawkewood, came to his death through a wound in the skull, inflicted by an iron hammer held in the hands of one Ham Gow, a tramp, who was aided and abetted in his felony by one Henri Delaplaine, the valet of his late lordship."

Mr. Ball, being a justice of the peace, and on the spot, immediately made out two warrants and placed them in the hands of a constable—one was for the arrest of Ham Gow, the tramp, the other for that of Henri Delaplaine, the valet.

The jury then retired to the steward's room, where, by the orders of the new Earl of Hawkewood, they were regaled with a collation of bread and cheese, cold ham and beef, porter and ale.

After partaking heartily of these refreshments, they left the house and dispersed to their homes.

The crowd outside, who had heard of the verdict that had been rendered, and the warrants that had been issued, continued to loiter about the grounds in the hope of hearing of some new developments, until they saw the coroner and the jury file out and leave the premises. When giving up all expectations of any fresh intelligence, they slowly wended their ways homeward.

The body of the murdered earl, given up now to the household, awaited only the offices of the undertaker. But as it was nearly eleven o'clock at night, it was, of course, too late for that gloomy functionary to commence his operations.

The body was therefore left where it had been laid out for the inspection of the coroner's jury—on the table in the long justice room. It was covered over with a Marseilles counterpaine, and all the windows were hoisted to admit air, though the Venetian shutters were closed and fastened on the inside for security. Then the doors were locked and left so. No guard was now deemed necessary in the room of death.

By twelve o'clock the very much fatigued household went to rest.

It is to be presumed that notwithstanding the tragic situation they all slept soundly; for when, at eight o'clock the next morning, the Hawkeville undertaker, Jonas Blackstone, made his appearance at the Hall, none of the servants were in readiness to receive him.

He rang and knocked at the principal portal without gaining any response. Then he went around to the servants' entrance, and, after much trouble, succeeded in rousing a footman who slept next to the butler's pantry, and who came half dressed and half asleep to open the door.

"You are a pretty set of lazy villains to be about a nobleman's house! I don't wonder murders are committed here! I saw an open window on the ground floor as I came along, and I might have got in and gone through the house and helped myself, had I been so inclined. Couldn't make anybody hear me. Thought you were all murdered this time! Well, I was to be at the Hall at eight o'clock this morning,

and I was here sharp. But it is half-past eight now, through waiting for you to open the door. Now, then, show me in to the dead room," concluded Mr. Blackstone, dropping down on a chair to get his breath.

The footman, who was gaping and rubbing his eyes, at length brought out the words:

"The room wheer my lord's body lies is locked up, and his reverence, the Rev. Dr. Laude, has got the key."

"Well, then, go and get the key or ask the Rev. Dr. Laude to come and unlock the door for me," said the undertaker, impatiently.

The yawning footman nodded his head in compliance, and staggered blindly away on his errand, for he was still half asleep.

About twenty minutes later the doctor came down in his dressing-gown and cap, with the key in his hand.

Immediately on seeing the tutor, the manner of the undertaker changed. He became very humble and very solemn. He arose and bowed with deep gravity, and stood waiting respectfully for the doctor to speak first.

"Well, Blackstone, it is about fifteen years since the Hall has required your services," began Dr. Laude.

"Yes, your reverence; it is just fifteen years since his late lamented lordship passed away," sighed the undertaker.

"We little thought that your next services would be required for the young earl."

"Very little, indeed, your reverence; but 'we are here to-day and gone to-morrow,' as the saying is."

"Ay, ay; there never was a truer word! But come with me now. I will take you to the death room."

Dr. Laude led the way, followed by the undertaker.

They passed through several narrow back passages until they came at length to the great hall running through the center of the vast structure.

Dr. Laude unlocked the door on the right which led into the justice room, which he entered, closely followed by the undertaker.

"There," said the latter, "that is the window I saw open from the outside! Very careless of the servants to leave it

so unless it was done for ventilation, and then there ought to have been a watch set."

The doctor, who had walked into the center of the room, now suddenly paused, looked around and exclaimed:

"Great Heaven!"

The undertaker then looked around to see what was amiss, but he could detect nothing wrong. The room, it is true, was in partial obscurity, notwithstanding the one window that was ajar.

"Is anything wrong, your reverence?" he inquired, advancing toward the doctor, who was standing in the middle of the floor near a table on which lay a white object, the whole picture indistinct to the questioner.

"For the Lord's sake, throw open all the windows, Blackstone! Let us have some light! Good Heaven! It cannot be possible!" exclaimed the doctor, who still stood panic-stricken, spellbound, where his footsteps had first been arrested near the table.

The undertaker stared in perpelexity upon the speaker.

"Do you not hear what I say, man? Have you no ears? I tell you—the body of the earl is gone!" almost screamed the doctor.

"'The—body—gone!'" slowly and incredulously muttered the undertaker. "That cannot be, your reverence! Who would want his lordship's body? We have got no medical colleges or students hereabout; and who else would steal it? Where was the body laid out, your reverence?"

"In this room, of course! On this table! Here is the pillow on which the head rested! Here is the counterpane which covered it! Did you not know that this was the room in which the inquest was held? In which the body was left to wait your offices? And in which I expected to find it? Why else should I have brought you here?" demanded the doctor.

"To be sure, of course, I thought it was here; but when I didn't see it, I thought we were going through this room to some other room where it was. But, your reverence, don't be alarmed until you know it is gone. Maybe some of them men folks have moved it back to his bedroom for

some purpose of their own, to dress it for the coffin, or something," suggested the undertaker.

"Nonsense! Would they have taken it through the window, even supposing they had dared to meddle with it at all without orders? The door was locked, and I had the key, and the door was found fast as it was left. Would they have taken it through the window?" irascibly demanded the doctor.

"No, to be sure they would not," admitted the undertaker.

"Yet the body has been taken out of the window! The window was found open. We must rouse the house and set inquiry on foot to discover who has been guilty of this most heinous offense!" exclaimed the doctor, hurrying off to put his resolution in execution.

In a few minutes the whole establishment was roused. A thorough search was made of the entire house by the appalled and bewildered servants, but no trace was found either of the stolen body or of the thieves who were supposed to have carried it away.

Detectives were employed, and a reward was offered for its recovery.

CHAPTER V

THE APPARITION OF THE RUINED TOWER

Ha! whence comest thou? Away!
There's blood upon thy hands,
And blood upon thy brow,
And sin upon thy soul.
Go, get thee from the land!
The sleuth-hound dogs thy steps,
Behind thee lurks thy crime,
Before thee looms thy fate!
Begone and leave my sight!

At about the same hour in which the undertaker arrived at Hawkewood Hall, a rather startling incident occurred at the ruined watchtower at Demondike, on the beach.

The sun had just sparkled up from the sea on the horizon's edge, striking a path of dazzling light across the waters to the land and shining on the desolate rock-bound coast.

The tide was very high, the dike was very full, and the thunder of the waves on the coast and the roaring of the waters in the dike made a din that was almost deafening.

A curling column of white smoke issuing from the rude chimney of the tower showed that the inmates were astir.

Within the strong room two women were busy at work. They were the Old Nan and the Young Nan.

The former was engaged in hanging a teakettle over the fire she had just kindled, and the latter was making up the rude bed in the bunk that had been the sleeping-berth of both women.

Old Nan had changed but little since the first day of her arrival, twenty years before, unless, as it was often said, that age had hardened and toughened rather than weakened and subdued her.

She had the same tall, gaunt, masculine-looking form, the same large, bony features, dark, florid face, and coarse red hair, rather rusty now, and she wore the same style of clothing—the dark-blue linsey-woolsey gown and the red silk head handkerchief.

Young Nan, a very handsome woman of about thirty-five years, was nearly as tall as her mother, but had a much finer form, features, and complexion than that mother in her youth had ever boasted.

Young Nan had a clear-cut Grecian profile, with its low forehead, straight nose, short upper lip, and round, pointed chin. Her skin was white, her cheeks were rose, and her lips coral, and her stately head was covered with a profusion of rich, dark auburn hair.

She was attired in a crimson serge gown, and had a white muslin handkerchief tucked in about her neck and over her full, rounded bosom.

Her sleeves were rolled up to her elbows and her shapely white arms were shown to the best advantage as she tossed over the mattress, or shook out the sheets in making up the bed.

" 'Twere a good landing we made that night, mother,"

said Young Nan, as she shook out the gay patchwork quilt over the outside of the bed and began to tuck it in.

"Ay, it were! Thanks to the fête at the Hall, and Mosey's ambition to be present at it. It was Mosey's watch, it were, that night, and I could a-larfed when Red Dennis offered to change wi' him and take it if the lieutenant were agreeable. So good-natured o' Red Dennis to take the watch and let Mosey go up to see the fireworks at the Hall, eh? Listen here! We landed fifty kegs of French brandy and two cases of silk."

"Eh! No!"

"Yes, we did. Red Dennis told me so. Besides, I seen 'em, though I didn't count 'em!"

"I should like to have seen that!"

"Well, then, why didn't you stay here instead of gallivanting over to the Hall to see the fireworks, eh?"

"Mother, I went to take Mosey off. He wouldn't have thought of going if it hadn't been for me. Dennis put me up to ask Mosey to take me to see the fireworks, and I did; and he said it was his watch at Demondike that night between eight and twelve, so I put him up to change with Red Dennis, who had the morning watch farther up the coast, where it would have been impossible to have found a landing-place. So Mosey asked the lieutenant up at the coastguard station, and the lieutenant, who values Mosey beyond all the force, and would do anything for him—was agreeable and allowed the change to be made."

"And so the most knowing smuggler on the coast guarded her majesty's revenue interests that night, and we run in a cargo worth two hundred pounds. Ah! if Red Dennis could be put on this beat altogether, or if we could win over Mosey to our cause! We would soon make money enough to retire. I say, lass! Mosey dotes on thee! Why canst not win him to thy will?" demanded Old Nan slyly.

"Mosey is a saintly milksop, mother. Mosey is trying to coax me to join his church, and marry and settle down, as he calls it! As if I was not 'down' enough already."

"He wants to marry thee, does he?"

"Ay! and I old enough to be his mother!"

"Nay, nay, lass! Thee is thirty-five and he is thirty.

And the wretch! to lift his eyes to thee, who should have been a——"

"Hush, mother! I cannot bear that!—And here is some one coming! Who is here?" exclaimed Young Nan, starting back.

She might well ask, for the figure that staggered in at the doorway and reeled and fell prone upon the floor might have startled and appalled a woman with even firmer nerves than Young Nan possessed—could such a woman have been found.

It was a tall, gaunt, pallid young man, clothed only in his shirt and drawers, all of which, together with his matted, black hair and cadaverous face, was stained with blood.

"Who is it? What's all this here?" cried Old Nan, hurrying to the spot where the man had fallen.

"It's—it's—it is—Ham!" cried Young Nan, stooping over the insensible form.

"Ham! How came he here? I did not know he was in the country! When did he get back?" inquired the old woman, bending over the body.

"I don't know, mother! I don't know no more than you do! But he has been—been doing something! Don't you see? He has been wounded—maybe killed. Who knows?" cried Young Nan, as she raised the head of the prostrate man, and, sinking down on the floor, drew it upon her lap.

"No! no! he is not killed! He has only fainted from fatigue, or loss of blood! See! he breathes!" exclaimed Old Nan, hurrying to a rough corner cupboard and pouring out a glass of brandy from a bottle that stood there.

"Here, lass. Pour a little of this down his throat—pure cognac, as never heard tell of a custom house, or got tainted wi' duty," said the old woman, stooping down to hand the younger one the brandy.

The latter seized it eagerly, raised the head of the man higher, and, with some difficulty, poured a few drops of the stimulant into his mouth.

He swallowed it, chokingly, then revived a little, and swallowed more without choking, and finally finished the glass, and drew a long breath.

"Ham," cried the younger woman, as she handed the

empty tumbler to her mother, "what'st been up to, lad?"

"Help me to the cave! Hide me! Hide me!" hurriedly exclaimed the tramp.

"Surely, surely, we will! Canst rise? What's the trouble? Hast been poaching? Wast wi' the gamekeepers?" cried Young Nan, as she tried to raise the man to his feet.

"Hurry! Hurry! Hide me! Quick! They will be here!" cried the tramp, in a faint though agitated voice.

"Come, help me, mother! I'm afraid he cannot stand. Canst use thy limbs, lad?"

"Try me! Help me up! Quick!" exclaimed the man.

By the united efforts of the two strong women, the man was raised to his feet, but he could not stand a moment nor could they sustain him.

He sank to the floor again, murmuring:

"It's no good. They'll take me, and the game'll be up."

The two women holding on to him had broken his fall by lowering him to the floor, and now they stood over him in despair.

A noise was heard outside—the noise of swiftly approaching steps.

"Who is that?" exclaimed Young Nan, in alarm.

"The bumbaillies after me! It's no good. I'm a goner! It ain't so bad as they think, however. And I shall get some fun out of it yet," laughed the tramp, in ironical desperation.

"They sha'n't take you out of this room! They sha'n't cross that threshold! Or if they do, they sha'n't go back again alive!" cried Old Nan, running to the corner and seizing a loaded gun.

Meanwhile, Ham Gow, from his lair on the floor, and Young Nan, from her stand above him, glared at the doorway.

"Put up your gun, missus. Don't be afeared, Nan. It's all right, mate. It's me."

"Red Dennis!" exclaimed the three inmates of the ruined tower in one breath, as the false coast guardsman entered the place.

"Right you are! I don't know who you've got here on the floor, but seeing where he is, I takes him to be a friend.

I come to warn you, if Ham is about, to hide him. There be a warrant out agin' him," said Red Dennis, a short, stout man, with a broad, red face and a thick shock of red hair and beard.

"Ham is here!"

"This is Ham!"

"I am Ham!" exclaimed three voices in one breath.

"Ham here! That Ham! You Ham? Why, wot ever have you been doing to yourself? I didn't know you, mate, I swear! But I ain't got no time to talk. There be a warrant out agin' you, Ham. The bumbaillies have it. I run off to tell you, and they are not half a mile behind me!"

"A warrant out agin' me? Here; lend the women a hand to help me downstairs. What's the warrant out agin' me for?" demanded the tramp, as he gave his hand to his new friend and struggled once more to his feet.

"For the murder of the young Earl of Hawkewood!" exclaimed the informer, as he helped the tramp toward the narrow steps cut in the thickness of the wall, and leading to the crypt below.

"The murder of the young Earl of Hawkewood!" echoed the two women, after a moment's pause of consternation and horror.

"Yes, that's it! The murder of the young Earl of Hawkewood—more's the pity," moodily repeated Red Dennis.

"But—is the young Earl of Hawkewood murdered?" inquired Ham Gow, as he slowly descended the dark, steep, and narrow steps in the wall behind the chimney.

"Come, now; that's a good one! Is the young Earl of Hawkewood murdered? Yes; he is murdered; and what call had you to go and murder a harmless young nobleman like he is? That's what we want to know," said Red Dennis.

"But I did not do it. When was he murdered, and where?" inquired Ham Gow, with a dazed look.

"Come, now! As if you did not know! In his own bed there in his room at Hawkewood Hall, yesterday morning before day; as you know a great deal better than anybody else—you, who turn up your eyes in horror at a little bit of innercent free trade, yet do not hesitate to beat a sleeping man's brains out with an iron hammer. If it wan't

for the regard I bear the missus and Young Nan it is not me that'd help you to hide yourself from the law."

"But, great Goliath of Gath! I never did it!"

"Now, Ham Gow, don't you depend on standing here with that defense. Get down to the cave as fast as you can, and stay there till you can be took off quiet to the coast of France."

"I'm awfully sorry that this has happened to his lordship," exclaimed the tramp, stopping and standing still in grief.

"You'll be more awfuller sorrier still when you're swung up for it, as you will be if you don't get down into that cave in double-quick. I tell you there is a warrant out agin' you!"

"But—upon what ground has a warrant been issued against me?" inquired the tramp, as Red Dennis hurried him onward across the crypt to a certan corner, where he proceeded to dislodge a stone, revealing a secret passage through the solid rocks.

"Upon the foundation of the coroner's 'quest verdict what set on the body last night, as I take it!"

"What was the verdict?" inquired Ham Gow, as he groped along the passage, held up on one side by Red Dennis and on the other by the two women, who listened in silence and with the deepest and most painful interest to every word that was spoken.

"Why, the verdict was as how the young Earl of Hawkewood came to his death by a wound on the head, made with an iron hammer held in the hands of one Ham Gow, who was aided and abetted by one Henri Delaplaine!"

"I begin to see!" exclaimed the unlucky tramp, striking his forehead with his clinched fist.

"Oh, you do, do you?—Well, here we are in the cave," concluded Red Dennis, as the whole party emerged from the long, dark, and sinuous passage into a large amphitheater of rock lighted by a fissure in the cliffs that overhung the beach. This fissure was about halfway between the top and the bottom of the cliff, was totally inaccessible, and from the outside was invisible.

In this manner it lighted up the whole cave to those

within, without betraying its existence to any outside spectators.

"Ham, dear, was that the—the—I mean was that what you were afraid of when you first rushed into the tower and asked us to conceal you?" inquired Young Nan.

The tramp put his hand to his head in a bewildered manner and reflected for a moment, and then answered dubiously:

"I—don't—know. I don't think so—I don't think—I had heard of the earl's murder then."

"Well, what were you afraid of, Ham, when you begged us to hide you?"

"I—was afraid—they'd catch me, and—find out all about it," replied the tramp, with a still more dazed look.

"About what, Ham?" gently inquired Young Nan.

"Let's see—about—about—— Blame my head! It's off again!" muttered the tramp, putting both hands up to his temples.

"What were you afraid they would find out? And who were you afraid would find it out?" inquired Young Nan.

The tramp looked confusedly and helplessly at the questioner, threw his hands to his head, and dropped down heavily to the ground, where he lay motionless.

"He's dead! My lad is dead!" screamed Young Nan, wringing her hands in an agony of sorrow.

"No, he's not, neither!" exclaimed Red Dennis, running to a rill of clear water that trickled from a little cleft in the rock and flowed in a little stream through the cavern toward the sea.

He took his cap from his head, filled it with water from this natural fountain, and came back and knelt by the side of the unconscious man on the ground, and began to lave his head, while the two women knelt on the other side, anxiously looking on.

"No, he's not dead; but he's hurt pretty bad, I can tell you that, and it will take all your doctoring skill to fetch him through, missus!" continued the man.

"I'll go back to the tower and fetch my physic box," said Old Nan, rising.

"You won't budge! The officers are in the tower on the watch now, you may depend on it. If you were to go

back from this place and enter the tower through the secret pass, your doing so would show them the way to the cave, and then the game would be up—not only with Ham here, but with us, for all time, too!" exclaimed the smuggling coast guardsman, as he continued to wash the head and face of the wounded man.

In doing so, he revealed a fearful gash in the upper part of the forehead.

"Oh! that was his death blow!" cried Young Nan, in anguish.

"No, it wasn't. T'would a-been the death blow o' many another man, but not o' Ham. Goliath! Ham's got the hardest head in all Cornwall. George! He must a-had a hard fight of it! The young Earl of Hawkewood sold his life high, if so be Ham Gow took it. Why, he looks as if he had lost all the blood in his body!"

"Ham never took the young earl's life! Never! Why, Ham is incapable of committing a crime! He will not even countenance smuggling—though for our sakes he will not betray you!" fiercely exclaimed Young Nan.

" 'Twasn't me that put it on him, Nan. I don't see what call he had to kill the young earl. They used to be as good friends as ever a peer and a peasant could be. So it wasn't for enmity he killed him."

"And he doesn't seem to have brought any valuables away with him, not even a suit of clothes, so it warn't for plunder neither," said Old Nan.

"But they do say the earl was robbed—heavily, too—all his money and jewelry, and much of his clothing, and other effects, was took," said Red Dennis.

"Well, Ham is certainly above robbery; nothing could tempt him to that!" cried Young Nan.

"Besides, he hasn't brought anything, not even a suit of clothes, away with him," added Old Nan, rather regretfully.

"But 'tis said he had a confederate—Henri Delaplaine, the valet, who might have gone off with the booty, to be divided at some more convenient time," Red Dennis explained.

"That might be," admitted Old Nan, in a more cheerful tone.

"Hold your tongue, Dennis Prout! How dare you hint that Ham could be an accomplice of thieves?" fiercely exclaimed Young Nan, as soon as her indignation would allow her to speak.

"Beg pardon, Nan. I was only trying to get at the case for the good of all concerned," soothingly replied the man.

"And he without a suit of clothes to his back!" angrily added the younger woman.

"Hello! What's here?" exclaimed Dennis, who, in opening the shirt bosom of the wounded man, had noticed for the first time the fine quality of the linen.

"What's where? Is the de'il in the man?" cried Old Nan.

"Since when has Ham Gow been wearing 'purple and fine linen' like a gentleman? Leastways, fine linen for certain! Did you notice this, Mother Crook?" demanded Dennis Prout, pointing to the delicate fabric of which he spoke.

"No, I didn't notice it. I only noticed the hurt boy and saw he had a suit of underclothes and no upper ones, that's all!" growled the crone.

"Well, here you are, then! Look at this! the finest of fine linen! Ay, and by George! the initial 'H,' with a coronet!"

"Well, 'H' stands for Ham, don't it?" demanded Young Nan.

"Yes, but the coronet don't, whereas both of them stand for the Earl of Hawkewood! No denying of it, missus! Ham Gow has got on one of the young earl's stolen shirts!" said Prout positively.

The announcement of this strange fact drew both women closer to the wounded man; they examined the shirt, they scrutinized the mark which was at the back of the neck band, and then they drew back, shuddering.

"So you see it looks black for Ham, as to the murder and robbery both," sighed the coast guardsman.

"Ham never did either!" cried Young Nan, with a great sob, as she covered her face with her hands. "He never did either. I don't understand how he comes to be wearing the murdered man's shirt, but he never murdered or robbed the earl!"

"No! he never did! But if he had done it, he had good reason!" added Old Nan vindictively.

"Mother, for mercy's sake, hush! And you, Dennis Prout, what are you sitting there for, mopping the poor boy's face and hands? What good does that do? He will die while we are waiting for better help!" cried the young woman in wild alarm.

"He will be taken and tried and hanged for the earl's murder, if one of us should leave this cave for the tower, while the law officers are there," said Prout; "but, how-s'ever," he added, after a pause, "I'll go and reconnoiter."

"Do, Dennis! Do, and come back quickly!" pleaded Young Nan.

The man dried the face of his patient with the red handkerchief Old Nan had taken from her head for the purpose, and then he aose and left the cave by the secret passage.

He groped his way along its sinuous windings, between damp walls and under a dripping roof, all in total darkness. There was one sure circumstance about this underground passage: there was no such thing as losing your way in it. There were no branches. Following it from the cave, you were sure to reach the hole through which you could creep into the cellar.

Prout soon reached this hole.

Here he paused and listened; but heard no sound. Then he ventured to move the stone a little way and peep in.

The cellar was partly lighted through crevices in the ceiling above. His keen eyes failed to detect anyone near.

Then he rolled the stone aside, slipped through the hole and rolled the stone back again. This stone was precisely like hundreds of others that formed the foundation of the tower. If it was a little loose in its place, why, so were several others; but this had also another advantage favorable for concealment; it was in a pitch-dark corner of the cellar.

Prout congratulated himself so far. Even if he were found in the cellar, it would not matter, now that the entrance into the secret passage was hidden securely again.

He crossed over to the steps leading up to the strong room above, rolled aside a second stone, and began to ascend the steep and narrow stairs cut in the thickness of the wall.

When he reached the top, he listened again, but heard nothing. He opened the iron door that pretended on the face of it to be the door of a Dutch oven adjoining the fireplace—but he only opened it for a few inches to peep out. The strong room was in a blaze of light, for every door and window was wide open; but he saw no one there; the room was empty.

Emboldened by this view, he pushed the iron gate aside and came out.

Everything about the place was in the utmost confusion, showing that the officers of the law had been there and had made a thorough search.

Now Dennis Prout felt quite safe. He slid the iron trapdoor, that formed the bottom of the Dutch oven, into its place, and he closed the iron door. If, therefore, any officer of the law, or anybody else who was not in the secret, should happen to open that iron door on the right of the fireplace, they would only see a large old baking-oven, and could never suppose that the bottom of it was a sliding trapdoor, covering the head of a flight of steps leading down through the thickness of the wall to the crypt or cellar beneath.

The first thing Dennis Prout did was to go outdoors and reconnoiter.

North, south, east, and west, as far as his eyes could reach, there was not a living creature to be seen.

Behind him lay the downs, rolling northward to the dark woods, against which, as against a dense green background, stood the dark-red walls and towers of Hawkewood Hall.

To the east, across the dreadful chasm of Demondike, rolled the same downs until they were lost to sight on the horizon.

To the south lay the sandy beach and "the multitudinous seas," sparkling away until they seemed to meet the sky in the vast distance. Not a single sail was to be seen on its rippling blue expanse.

To the west rolled the downs again monotonously, until some miles away they were varied by what seemed at this distance mosaic work, of white and red and gray and yellow, but which was really the hamlet of Hawkeville.

"Nobody within a mile of Demondike now! 'Spose they'll be back, though. Shouldn't wonder if they didn't detail an officer, or maybe two or three, to watch the house. Must make the best use of the time that is left me, however. Guess I have got two good hours before anybody can get back here," muttered Prout, as he reëntered the house.

He went to work rapidly.

First he found a small shawl, which he spread out upon the floor. Then he searched and found the old woman's physic box, brandy bottle, tea cannister, sugar box, match box, tin teapot, tin cup, and a bundle of fagots—all of which he tied up together in the shawl.

Then he locked and barred the door and closed and bolted the window shutters and began his descent into the crypt, carrying the bundle with him.

His progress in going back was slower than his progress in coming, for he had to take care of his precious bundle.

At length, however, he had passed laboriously down the concealed steps, through the crypt, along the secret passage, and had emerged into the lighted cave.

CHAPTER VI

THE INMATE OF THE CAVERN

Couched on the straw, from suffering free,
He sleeps, like careless infancy.—SCOTT.

"WHAT a time you have been!" was the ungrateful greeting of Young Nan.

"I have been all the way back to the strong room, feeling my way at every step for safety, as I wouldn't trust you to feel yours. The peelers have been through the place, and turned everything topsy-turvy. But they are gone now, and I have made everything fast, and I have brought what was most necessary for our boy. How is he?" anxiously inquired Prout.

"His head is as hot as fire! Feel it!" exclaimed Young Nan.

"Ay, he has a fever, sure enough," replied Dennis, after he had laid his hand on Ham's head.

"And he mutters in his sleep," added Young Nan.

"Ay, he has delirium also," said Prout, as he put his bundle down on the ground and began to untie it.

"He'll die! He'll die here, for want of a doctor!" exclaimed Young Nan.

"Not he. I'll back Mother Crook agin' all the doctors in the world for bringing a man through a broken head," cried Dennis Prout cheerfully. "And now, missus," he continued, turning to Old Nan, "look here, and see what I have brought you, and see what else you want, and I'll fetch it, for I am going back to the strong room now, to get what is necessary before the peelers return, perhaps, with a guard to watch the house, as you have every reason to fear they will."

"To know they will, the villains!" amended Old Nan vindictively. Then, after examining the contents of the bundle, she turned and said:

"Thee'st shown judgment in what hast brought, Dennis. Canst bring a mattress, pillows, and bedclothes down, dost think?"

"Of course I can. It won't be very easy to fetch 'em down those steps, but I'll do it."

"I wish thee would. He is lying on the wet, cold, hard ground now, and little good will my doctoring do him while he is so."

"Then I am off now, Mother Crook," exclaimed the coast guardsman, starting up and going toward the secret door, through which he soon disappeared.

Practice makes perfect. This was the third time this day Dennis Prout had attempted the secret passage, and he traveled swiftly.

He did not stop to reconnoiter, either, knowing now that he could not be surprised.

He soon found himself within the strong room which he had taken such pains to secure on his previous visit. But it was so dark that he found it necessary to open the window to give him light before he could make up the bundle of bedding he had promised Old Nan to carry to the cave.

This window looked inland toward Hawkewood Hall.

It now occurred to Dennis Prout to take down an old spyglass that hung over the mantelpiece and take an observation.

He immediately acted on the suggestion.

Kneeling before the window he rested the spyglass on the sill, then adjusted the lenses to his sight and swept the downs that lay between the ruined tower and the Hall.

At first there was nothing to be seen; but presently, miles away, there appeared a group of men ascending one of the rolling hills, with their faces toward the tower.

As they reached the top of the hill Dennis Prout recognized them by their uniform to be police officers. He watched them for a few moments until they sank from view in an intervening valley, and then he put down his spyglass, saying:

"They are nearly three miles off and walking leasurely up hill and down dale. It will be an hour and a half before they are here, and we can be ready to receive them."

He went immediately to work, and made up a bundle of bedclothing, and pushed it through the secret passage and down the narrow steps to the crypt below.

Then he took the mattress from under the feather bed on the bunk, and, rolling it up lengthways, forced it through the passage and tumbled it down the steps.

Then he sent two pillows down the same way.

Finally he put a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk in his capacious pockets and began the descent of the steps.

On reaching the crypt he was forced to leave many of the articles there, for he had to hurry on and warn the women of the approach of the police force.

"I have brought you a pillow and a blanket for the boy. The other things are in the crypt, and you can get them at your leisure. Now, what I wish to tell you is this: The peelers are on their way to the tower. They mean to watch it. That is what I believe; so unless you both intend to spend the night in this cave, or to reënter the tower in full view of the peelers, and by doing so reveal to them the secret passage—unless you intend to do one of these mad things, I say, you must quickly make up your minds which

of you is to remain here and take care of Ham, and which is to go above and hoodwink the peelers."

"I will stay with my boy," said Young Nan decisively.

"Thee'll do naught o' the sort," said Old Nan, still more decisively. "How canst take care of him when thee knowst naught of wounds or yarbs? I will stay and look after the lad, and thee will go and tackle the peelers."

Old Nan's word was law, and her skill in medicine was undoubted, at least by her daughter. So it was settled that Mrs. Crook should remain below with the wounded man, while Young Nan returned to the tower with Dennis Prout.

Ham Gow was already sleeping quietly under the influence of a cooling and composing draught administered by Old Nan.

"Hurry up, now. We must be back to the tower before the peelers reach it," said Dennis Prout.

Young Nan hastily stooped and kissed the pallid brow of the wounded man, and followed Dennis from the cave.

When they reached the tower Dennis went at once to the north window of the strong room and looked out. The men were now just visible to the naked eye. They were again on the brow of a swelling hill much nearer the tower then the one from which Dennis had first seen them descend.

"They will be here in twenty minutes, Nan, but we will be ready for them," said the man, as he shut down the window.

Nan, who was neat in all her ways, and under all circumstances, began to make up the tumbled bed, and put the disordered room to rights.

"Tell you what, my girl, I will go out and walk up and down on the beach—my occasional beat, you know. Then, when they get near the tower, I will join them, promiscuous-like, and come in with them."

"Yes, go! It would not be seemly for a respectable coast guardsman to be seen in the company of the likes of me," exclaimed the woman bitterly.

"Nay, don't say that, lass, or down I sit and here I stay," said the man, throwing himself into a chair.

"Go! go! You must not be suspected, as we are. A single spark of suspicion lighting upon you would blow

us all to destruction. If you were suspected you would be discharged or secretly watched; and in either case we should be ruined. Go!" said the woman, peremptorily, pointing to the door.

"I go for your sake, Nan," replied the man, picking up the hat that lay at his feet, and walking out of the tower.

He sauntered slowly to the beach and paced up and down on the sands.

It was ebb tide, and, indeed, almost low tide now, and he paced up and down on the sands, sending an occasional glance inland toward the party of policemen, who were coming more and more distinctly into sight.

When they were near the tower, Dennis Prout sauntered slowly on to meet them.

"Good-afternoon, Upperman! Any news of the murderers yet?" he inquired of the foremost officer, a tall, black-whiskered, melancholy-looking man.

"None whatever, Prout! We can get not the slightest clue to the movements of the tramp or the valet. The sergeant thinks Gow will certainly come back here some time, and has detailed us to watch the tower," replied Upperman.

"So I thought when I saw you coming."

"You have heard of the other outrage?"

"No! What?"

"The stealing of the young earl's dead body," whispered the policeman, in an awe-inspiring tone.

"The stealing of the young earl's dead body!" echoed the coast guardsman, under his breath.

"Yes, didn't you hear of it?"

"Hear of it?" again echoed the coast guardsman, in a tone of amazement. "Why, no! I haven't heard of it, and I cannot believe it! The young earl's body stolen? Impossible! Who stole it—the medical students?"

"We do not know," replied Upperman.

"But where was it stolen from—the family vault?" inquired Prout, still staring in consternation.

"From the family vault! No, it had not been put there, as you must know very well, if you would think for a moment! Why, the funeral was only fixed for next Saturday! The body wasn't even in the coffin. It was lying out on the table in the long dining-room, where it had been laid

for the coroner's inquest, at ten o'clock last night, to await the offices of the undertaker."

"Bless my soul alive! Wasn't the body watched?" inquired the gaping coast guardsman.

"No. Why should it have been? Who would have supposed there was any danger of its disappearing?"

"No one, in course! But—wasn't it locked up, then?"

"Fast! The window shutters were closed and bolted. And the door was locked on the outside, and Dr. Laude took away the key himself."

"Then how on earth could the body have been stolen?"

"That's the conundrum nobody can guess."

"Was the room broken into?"

"Apparently not!"

"What time was the body stolen?"

"Somewhere after midnight, it is supposed."

"Bless my old grandmother! That was a go! When was it found out? Who found it out?"

"This morning, when the undertaker, Blackstone, came and roused 'em all up, for they slept late after so much loss of rest. Dr. Laude himself conducted the undertaker to the dining-room, and then discovered the theft of the body. One of the front windows was wide open and the body was gone."

"Great snakes! And you say the room had not been broken into?"

"Seems not. The fastenings on the open window were all in good order as those of any window that had been opened lawfully from the inside of the house that morning."

"Then what do they think about it?"

"One theory is that the thieves got in some time during the day, while the room was open, and before the inquest began; that they hid themselves under the table, which was covered with a deep-black cloth that hung all the way down to the floor, under which they remained unsuspected during all the proceedings, and that they waited until midnight, when all the family were asleep, and then opened the window and carried off the body easily enough."

"That sounds very likely. Who do they think it was? You say they don't think it was the medical students?"

"No, I didn't. I said they didn't know who it was. But they do suspect the medical students, because there is nobody else to suspect."

"That is really so. Bless my old grandmother! Bless all my old forefathers, if I ever had any! I never heard of such doings in the whole course of my long and useful life! Why, the stealing of the murdered man's body beats the murder all out!" exclaimed Dennis.

"Well, it does, and that is a fact. Murders are common enough—too common—though it is not often you hear of a peer of the realm being found murdered in his bed; but the theft of the body under the circumstances is unparalleled."

"You said there was no clue to the murderers yet?"

"There's no clue to the retreat of Gow and Delaplaine, and there is no doubt that they were the murderers, and that their object was plunder. Why, the amount of the money and jewels stolen is estimated at fifteen thousand pounds!"

"Fif—teen—thou—sand—pounds! Whe-ew! They risked their necks for something. However could they have got away with all that?"

"Easily, because the most valuable part of the booty was in small compass. Why, Castor and Pollux could have been carried in a man's mouth!"

"Castor and Pollux!" repeated the coast guardsman, with a puzzled look.

"The Twin Stars, some call 'em."

"Twin Stars!" repeated the man, in growing perplexity.

"The famous Hawkewood diamonds. A pair of big solitaire diamonds that his lordship wore as sleeve buttons at his birthday fête the night before he was murdered. They alone were worth fourteen thousand pounds. All the rest of the booty did not amount to more than a thousand more."

"Great whales! What a haul! And you have no clue to the whereabouts of the robbers and murderers?"

"None as yet; but we have made a discovery that may lead to a clue!"

"What is that, if you don't mind telling—though you police are very secret sometimes!"

"I don't mind telling this, because it is no secret at all! Lady Volante Belle Isle's French maid, Mademoiselle Melaine Labbé, has fled, and it is known that the valet, Delaplaine, was sweet on her."

"Bl-a-zes! Look here, Upperman, don't tell me anything else just yet! You make me giddy!" said the coast guardsman.

Then in contradiction of himself he suddenly demanded: "When was she missing?"

"Not until to-day, though it appears that she has not been seen by any of the family since the night of the murder."

"And is it supposed that she fled with Ham Gow?"

"No!" exclaimed the policeman, indignantly. "Do you suppose a young lady's young lady would lower herself to a tramp? No! It is believed that she has fled with my lord's gentleman, Monsieur Delaplaine."

"Perhaps she was accessory to the murder."

"No, she wasn't! She wasn't in the house at the time. She didn't attend her ladyship to the Hall. The duchess brought her own maid, Mrs. Greylock, to dress her grace and her ladyship. But to-day, as Lady Volante is still in bed suffering from the shock of the murder, and can't leave the Hall, the duchess sent over to Grand Manors for Mademoiselle Melanie, and received news that she had been missing from the castle since the evening previous."

"Oh! then there is no doubt as to where she has gone, I suppose."

"But little! Here we are at the tower! I hate to molest women! Especially unprotected women like these! But I must do my duty!" said Inspector Upperman, as he waved the men who accompanied him to stand back, and then stepped into the door that had been purposely left open.

He found Young Nan sitting down on a low stool, with a long, blue stocking drawn over her hand, busily engaged in darning and seemingly absorbed in her work.

"Good-afternoon, missus!" said the officer, as he entered the room.

"Good-afternoon," returned Nan, looking up for an instant from her work and then looking down at it again.

"Didn't find you here when we paid our visit to the tower this morning," he continued, coolly taking a seat and putting his hat down between his feet.

"I didn't know you owed the tower a visit," returned Nan, scrutinizing the hole in the stocking she was darning.

"Didn't you? Well, we did, then! Your—relation, Mr. Ham Gow, made quite an interesting visit to the young Earl of Hawkewood one night, and as his lordship is not in a condition to respond to it, his friends have deputed me to return it, and urged me—in case of his absence from the tower—to remain here until his return. So I may pay my respects to Mr. Gow in person," said the inspector, pleasantly, and with a bow.

"I know what you mean, you cruel wretch! You demon!" cried Young Nan, losing all her hardly sustained self-control—"I know there is a warrant out against our poor boy for the murder of Lord Hawkewood! But he was no more like to do a murder than you, no, nor half as much, you beast!"

The inspector bowed good-humoredly.

"Do you mean to say that you are going to stop here day and night?" demanded Nan.

"Until further orders, missus," evasively replied the inspector.

"Then you will starve to death, that is one comfort, for I have got nothing to give you to eat or to drink."

The inspector carefully drew from one capacious pocket a good-sized loaf of bread and from the other a big chunk of cheese and a flask of spirits, all of which he placed on the floor at his feet, saying coolly:

"The garrison is provisioned for several days, missus."

"Are you going to intrude here day and night, I ask you, in this place, where there are only women living, and where there is but this one room for eating and sleeping?" indignantly screamed Nan.

"Until further orders, as I said before, missus."

"It is indecent! It is outrageous!"

"Well, then, if you don't like my company, missus, just produce Ham Gow, and I will take him and go off peaceably."

"He is not here, as you might easily see for yourself!"

"Well, then, if he is not here, tell me where he is, and I will send one of my men to fetch him, and when I have him I will relieve you of my presence.'

"Where you will not get him! He is halfway across the channel by this time," said Young Nan, who did not hesitate to tell an untruth.

"Halfway across the channel, is he? Well, I will have to wait here until he comes back," said the inspector, with an incredulous smile.

Nan relapsed into sullen silence, so that all conversation between the two ceased.

Meanwhile the policemen who had accompanied the inspector sat down on large fragments of rock, each side the door, and held Dennis Prout in conversation.

"When did you see Ham Gow last?" inquired one.

"Haven't seen Gow for two years. Didn't know he had got back. Of course I don't mix with suspicious characters!" said Dennis stiffily.

"Beg pardon; I know you don't. If you did, you wouldn't be long in the coast-guard service. I only thought you might have seen him in the crowd at the Hall on the day of the fête, because he was among them," the policeman explained.

"But I wasn't, you see. I was on duty all day and night, taking the night as well as the day to accommodate a friend, who wanted to see the fireworks. And now you must excuse me, mate, for I have got to go up to the station to make a report to the lieutenant," said Prout, as he touched his hat politely and walked off.

And for several days affairs remained in the same state.

The hunted fugitive, Ham Gow, lay ill in the cave, carefully nursed by Old Nan, who possessed great skill in both medicine and surgery.

She and her patient were both close prisoners by reason of the police who were on guard at the ruined tower, through which was their only communication with the outer world. But their imprisonment did not matter to either.

Thanks to the forethought and promptitude of Dennis Prout, the old woman had at hand all the real necessaries of life. She never missed the comforts and luxuries which she had never possessed.

As for the young man, soothed into delicious repose by the sedative and cooling herb teas and decoctions applied inwardly and outwardly by his doctress, he lay in a state of blissful unconsciousness of all the evils of life.

The officers on guard at the ruined tower were relieved morning and evening by others, but the guard was kept up for a week.

Young Nan protested in vain against this invasion of her privacy; but she had no sort or right to a residence in the ruined tower. She and her mother were but tolerated squatters on the estate of the Earl of Hawkewood, paying no rent for their tenement, and holding no permit to occupy it.

The successor of Inspector Upperman who relieved that good-humored officer of his guard, was a rude, plain-spoken man, who told Young Nan that if she did not approve of his company, not being under arrest herself, she was at liberty to leave the tower, but that he should obey orders and stay there.

The only concession he made was to permit the poor woman to curtain off a portion of the room with quilts and blankets around her bed to construct a private sleeping compartment. And, of course, Nan went in and out of the tower as she pleased.

One of her greatest anxieties was that possibly Ham Gow might suffer for some medicine or food that was not at hand, or that Old Nan might be tempeted by weariness of confinement, or the want of something, to come out of the cave, and through the secret passage to the ruined tower, while the police remained in possession of it. Such a proceeding she knew must lead to the discovery of the underground passage, the arrest of Ham Gow, the seizure of the smuggled goods contained in the cavern, and the breaking up of their contraband trade.

But as we have shown, Nan's fears were groundless; for the old woman had everything she really needed about her and suffered no temptation to leave her helpless boy even for an hour's liberty.

Meanwhile all over the country the police were very actively engaged in searching for the fugitive "murderers," Ham Gow and Henri Delaplaine, and in trying to discover

the thieves who had stolen the body of the murdered earl. Immense rewards were offered for the apprehension of all or any of the criminals. Famous detectives from London were engaged to look up the case. But days passed without throwing any light upon the mystery.

One day Nan Crook walked out from the ruined tower and went down to the beach to watch for her comrade, Dennis Prout.

When at length he came in sight she hastened to meet him, and began at once to say:

"Can't you get up some story to beguile the police away from the tower? The longer they bide there the more dangerous it is. Mother'll get tired of staying down there in the cave, and she'll be coming up, and all will be discovered. Besides, I am so anxious to know how Ham is. He may be dying or dead, for aught I know."

"If he were either, the old dame'd come up for certain," interrupted Prout.

"And all that might happen at any time and everything be discovered! Dennis, listen! I told the police that Ham had gone across the channel. There's a reward offered for any information that may lead to his arrest. Now can't you get some of our men to give information that they saw him put off in a fishing craft to cross the channel on the morning after the fête, before the murder was discovered?"

Prout dropped his red head upon his chest and reflected for a few moments, and then answered:

"That's a good idea, Nan; I think I can work it out. Run away now, my girl! Here comes one of my comrades."

Nan turned away bitterly. She understood that the "respectable" coast guardsman did not wish to be seen in conversation with a "suspicious" character.

Before the week was over, however, a surprising event occurred that promised to throw a strong new light upon the dark mystery, clearing the accused men and revealing the real perpetrator of the murder.

Lady Volante Belle Isle had been so prostrated by the shock, when the murder was first discovered, that she had been conveyed to bed and put under medical treatment.

She had remained very ill during the inquest and for several days afterward.

On the first day, however, on which she was able to converse, she startled the duke, her father, very considerably, by saying:

"If you please, papa, I wish you to send for Mr. Ball, or some other magistrate, to come here and take my deposition. I have most important testimony to give in relation to the murder of the Earl of Hawkewood."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT LADY VOLANTE SAW

> With caution judge of probability;
> Things deemed unnatural, e'en impossible,
> Experience oft hath shown us to be true.
> —SHAKESPEARE.

"My dear Volante! My dear child! You have important testimony to give in relation to the murder of the Earl of Hawkewood! What on earth can you know of it, my girl?" inquired the duke, in amazement.

"I know that the two men—the poor vagrant, Ham Gow, and the valet, Henri Delaplaine, who, as I am informed, have been accused of the murder, are not guilty."

"Volante!"

"I speak the truth, papa! But I would rather not utter another word until I make a deposition under oath, in the presence of a magistrate. I wish you would send for Mr. Ball. I shall feel easier, and recover sooner, for having this burden off my mind," said the young lady.

"Volante! Is it possible that you can know who committed that murder? If so, how in the world came you to know it? Through your maid, Melanie Labbé?"

"No, papa! I have not seen nor heard of Melanie since I came here to the Hall. They tell me she has fled."

"In company of the valet, who is accused of participation in the murder of the earl; yes."

"She may have gone away to marry Delaplaine, for I know she was engaged to him. She told me so, and gave

me warning a few days ago; but he had nothing to do with the murder," said Lady Volante.

"My child! You have not answered my questions. I ask you again: Do you know who committed it, and if so, how came you by the knowledge?" repeated the duke.

"No, papa, I do not positively know who did the deed; but I do know that the two men who are accused did not do it," replied the young lady, very firmly.

"How can you positively know that, child?" demanded the duke, rather impatiently.

"Dear papa, to tell you would require an explanation too long and painful to be made twice. It is my bounden duty to make it before a magistrate, and I wish to make it then and there, once for all. Will you send for a magistrate, papa? You will be present, of course, and hear all that I have got to say. But you need not disturb mamma with this affair. It would be sure to distress her. And she has gone to her room with a headache to lie down and try to sleep it off."

"Very well, my dear. I have not far to send for a magistrate. Mr. Ball is here to-day. I will go and fetch him up."

"Stay, papa dear. Not just immediately. Ring for the nurse, please. I must rise and put on my dressing-gown and go into the boudoir to receive Mr. Ball."

"Are you able to do that, my dear? Will not the exertion throw you back?" anxiously inquired the duke.

"I am able to sit up a little while. The slight exertion will not hurt me. The change may do me good," replied the young lady.

The duke rang the bell and the sick-nurse entered the chamber.

"In fifteen minutes from this you may bring Mr. Ball into the next room. I shall then be ready to receive him," said Lady Volante, as the duke turned to leave the chamber.

"You had best ring when you are prepared for us, my dear," suggested the duke.

"You dear papa, you would not hear the bell. Please come in just fifteen minutes."

"Very well, dear."

The duke left the room.

Lady Volante, with the help of the nurse, got out of bed, donned a dark-blue cashmere wrapper, lined and faced with dark-blue satin, and passed into the adjoining boudoir, where she sank into an easy-chair near the crimson-curtained window.

It was a rich, warm-hued room, upholstered in crimson and gold, and lined with mirrors and choice pictures.

The nurse placed a footstool under the lady's feet and a stand by her side.

These arrangements were scarcely completed when there came a rap at the door.

The nurse went to it, and admitted the Duke of Grand Manors and Mr. Ball, of Bowling Downs.

The latter advanced with a bow, saying:

"I am happy to see you up again, my dear young lady."

"I thank you, Mr. Ball. Pray be seated. Nurse, you can retire," said the invalid.

The woman drew forth two chairs for Lady Volante's visitors, and then withdrew.

When she had closed the door behind her, the duke turned to the magistrate, and said:

"As I informed you, sir, my daughter has some important testimony to give in relation to the lamentable death of the young Earl of Hawkewood."

The magistrate bowed to the duke, and addressed the young lady:

"Yes, I understand from his grace that your ladyship wishes to make a deposition under oath as to some facts that have come to your knowledge touching that deplorable event."

"I do. Administer the oath to me, and I will state all I know," replied Lady Volante.

"Do you reflect, my dear young lady, that the statement you are about to make to me may subject you to the inconvenience of being subpœnaed as a witness on the trial, should anyone be tried for this murder?" inquired the magistrate, rather overstepping his official duty in giving this warning.

"I know that, sir, and I know, also, it is my bounden duty to give any information within my knowledge that may tend to vindicate the innocent and discover the guilty,

at whatever inconvenience to myself," firmly replied Lady Volante.

The duke nodded approval of his daughter's words.

The magistrate bowed, drew from his pocket a diamond edition of the New Testament, and, holding it out to the young lady, dictated the formula of the oath.

She repeated the words after him in a grave and even solemn tone, and then reverently took the book in her hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Now, then, my dear, go on; but speak slowly, for I must take down your testimony, and I am not quite so quick at that work as is my absent clerk," said the magistrate, as he drew a notebook, bottle of ink, and a gold pen from his pocket, and drew the little stand before him and prepared to write.

"You appear to carry your office about with you, Mr. Ball," said the duke, with a slight smile.

"I have carried this much of it about with me ever since the terrible events of last week," replied the magistrate.

"Are you ready, Mr. Ball?" inquired Lady Volante.

"Quite ready, your ladyship."

"Listen, then: It was on the evening, or, rather, to speak exactly, it was on the morning after the birthnight ball, for it was between three and four o'clock when the festivities ceased and the guests departed, with the exception of the few who were to remain for the night. We, the last-mentioned, had all retired to our chambers. My mother's maid, who also attended me, had come into my room; but, after requiring only a few little services from her, I sent her to her mistress, believing that the duchess might be waiting for her.

"I locked the door after Mrs. Greylock, and then sat down before the glass and began to unclasp the jewels from my neck. In doing so I noticed that the large solitaire diamond pendant was missing.

"I knew that I had had it on during my last waltz, and I thought I must have dropped it either in the ballroom or in one of the passages leading thence to my bedchamber.

"As the diamond was a family jewel of great value, I did not dare to leave it to the chance discovery of some dis-

honest person. Neither did I like to rouse the tired household then—at least, not until I had tried to find it alone.

"I therefore took my bedroom candle, which was half burned out, and set forth to look for my lost jewel, resolving that in case I should not find it to rouse the household to assist in the search.

"The hall clock struck four as I left my room. I passed along the main upper hall, but I must have taken the wrong turning in the unfamiliar house, for I entered what I have since heard was the 'bachelors' corridor.'

"As I was passing along this everything seemed very quiet, until suddenly a door opened.

"I was so startled and frightened that I immediately shrank out of sight up one of the dark cross passages, and shaded my lamp as well as I could.

"Two persons came out of that room, and from the light that shone out through the open door I recognized both. One was the valet, Henri Delaplaine; the other was the tramp, Ham Gow. I knew them both by sight, for I had seen them frequently in the neighborhood.

"I shrank still farther back into the dark passage, for I was afraid of being seen in my dishabille.

"But nearly at the same instant in which I saw the men leave the room and shrank back from them, I heard a voice, which I recognized as that of the Earl of Hawkewood:

" 'Out by the kitchen door, Delaplaine, and thence out by the north gate.'

"And immediately the open door was closed and locked by the earl within the room, while the valet was showing the tramp out," concluded Lady Volante.

"And you saw and heard all this?" inquired the magistrate in amazement.

"I saw and heard all this while I was shrinking back in the dark passage, shading my taper with my hand, at four o'clock in the morning," repeated Lady Volante.

"You say that you saw the chamber door open, the valet and the tramp come out of the room together, and you heard the voice of the earl, within the open door, directing the valet how to take the tramp from the premises, and then heard the earl close the door and lock himself in the room?" demanded the duke.

"Yes, papa, I saw and heard all that; and it all passed in one or two minutes," replied the young lady.

"But, don't you see, my dear, that what you saw proves nothing whatever in favor of the accused? You saw them go out, and you heard the earl lock them out; but later on they might have returned, picked the lock, and perpetrated that murder and that robbery."

"They might have done so, but they did not, papa. Later on some one else picked the lock and perpetrated the murder. I have not told all I saw. I saw much more than what I have told. I saw the real murderer at his fiendish work."

"Lady Volante!"

"My dearest child!"

These exclamations were simultaneously uttered by the duke and the magistrate.

"I saw the murderer," repeated the young lady, growing very pale and speaking very low.

"Under what circumstances?" inquired the magistrate, in an almost equally subdued voice.

"Papa, a glass of wine, please—I think you will find some in the next room," said Lady Volante, faintly.

"This has been too much for you. You should not have undertaken this task so soon," said the duke, as he arose and hastened into his daughter's bedchamber to fetch a glass of wine.

"I should have undertaken it sooner. I should have given this evidence in at the inquest. It would have changed the verdict," sighed Volante, regretfully and almost reproachfully.

"My dear young lady! Who could have possibly imagined such an improbable circumstance as that you should have known anything connected with the murder? No one thought of summoning you. Besides, if anyone had done so, you were much too ill to attend," replied Mr. Ball apologetically.

"That is true," sighed Lady Volante.

The duke returned with the glass of wine.

His daughter sipped half of it; then placed the glass on the table and continued her testimony:

"When the valet and the tramp had disappeared, and the earl had closed and locked his door, I came out of my

hiding-place and passed along to the main upper hall and down the grand staircase, looking for my pendant as I went.

"I could not find it there, so I passed down into the lower hall and on into the ballroom, where I looked very carefully, but in vain.

"I looked for a long time. I think I must have been two hours engaged in that vain search. Then my candle, which had burned very low, suddenly sank in its socket and went out.

"I should have been in total darkness but for the smoldering coal fires in the grates of the front and back chimneys. By their faint gleams of light I found my way to the door, with the intention of having the housekeepers and the butler roused to inquire for the lost jewel.

"Just as I passed out of the ballroom into the hall, however, I saw my missing diamond, shining like a glowworm, at the foot of the last step of the staircase.

"I picked it up with joy, and began to ascend the stairs, guiding myself through the darkness by the balusters. Thus I reached the great hall and felt my way along the walls, trying to reach the corirdor in which my apartments were situated.

"As I passed before the archway leading into the 'bachelors' corridor,' the moonlight from a painted glass window at the other end shone down the vista, and shone on the figure of a man who was just emerging from the earl's room."

Here the duke and the magistrate bent with breathless attention toward the speaker, who paused, reached her hand toward the glass of wine on the stand, sipped a few drops, replaced it and continued:

"The man wore a dark dressing-gown, corded around his waist, and a dark smoking-cap with a tassel at its side. His face was deadly pale and haggard, or it looked so in the moonlight. He glanced anxiously, fearfully, as it seemed to me, up and down the corridor.

"He could not see me, though I saw him distinctly, for I was in the deep shadows of the main hall, while he stood in the direct line of the moonlight from the painted window at the end of that corridor.

"After looking up and down with that scared expression for an instant, he stole out, softly closed the door and stole away silently, passing out of the line of light into the shadows of the corridor, where he disappeared from my view."

"Volante! Did you recognize this man?" inquired the duke, in a low voice.

"No, I did not, papa. Nor did I then suspect anything. I was startled and a little frightened, but I thought the man was probably some guest who was staying in the house, and whom I had not met, and that, feeling indisposed in the night, he had sought his host's room to procure assistance, and that he was afraid of disturbing other guests.

"Something like that passed through my mind as I went on to my own bedchamber; but I was too tired and drowsy to let the matter engage my thoughts. I went immediately to bed and fell fast asleep. I did not think of the affair again until we were told of the murder. Then I instantly connected what we heard in the morning with what I had seen in the night, and it was that connection which overwhelmed me."

"Volante, my child, you seem so positive that neither the valet nor the tramp had anything to do with the murder, yet——"

"The circumstances make me positive, papa. I saw the earl lock those men out. I saw the men depart," replied the young lady.

"Yet might not one of them have returned and picked the lock and perpetrated the deed, as I suggested before? Might not the man whom you subsequently saw come out of the earl's room have been the valet or the tramp?"

"No, papa, no—it is utterly impossible! Delaplaine and Gow are both dark-skinned, black-haired, black-bearded men. This one whom I saw last leave the earl's room was a very white-faced man with a smooth chin."

"In a dark dressing-gown and a dark smoking-cap, you say?"

"Yes; a dark dressing-gown, corded around his waist, and a dark smoking-cap with its point folded down on the left side and its heavy gold tassel shining in the moonlight."

"This man must have been some one who was staying in the house," suggested the magistrate.

"I do not know," replied the lady.

"Lady Volante! My dear young lady!" began the magistrate solemnly. "Remember that you have sworn to speak 'the truth'—which I have no doubt you will speak—and also 'the whole truth.' Are you telling the whole truth now, my dear? Are you keeping nothing back?"

"No, nothing whatever, in any manner relating to this case," firmly replied the lady.

"Not even your possible suspicion of the identity of this man whom you saw emerge from the earl's door on the night of the murder?"

"Not even that, for I had no suspicion of his identity," answered the lady.

"And yet it would seem that he must have been one of the guests in the house, and you must have seen him."

"I do not know. I did not recognize him at all as anyone I had ever seen before."

"Yet the male visitors who remained overnight are easily, very easily, counted—the duke, myself, and Mr. Lewis Manton, now the Earl of Hawkewood," said Mr. Ball.

Lady Volante Belle Isle smiled slightly, sadly, and answered:

"The man I saw looked like neither of the three."

"Some other one of the guests may have remained surreptitiously in the house, or some outsider may have taken advantage of the open doors and windows and secreted himself within it," suggested the duke.

"It may have been so," answered the magistrate.

"Yes," assented Lady Volante.

"Should your ladyship be able to recognize this man if you should see him again?"

"I do not know. I saw but little of his face. The collar of his dressing-gown was turned up around the nape of his neck and his cheeks. His smoking-cap was pulled down over his eyebrows and ears. I saw nothing of his face but his nose, mouth, and chin, white and smooth."

"You saw no one in the breakfast room that reminded you of him?"

"No one."

"Lady Volante, I will now read over the statement that you have made under oath, so that you may know it has been correctly taken down before affixing your signature," said the magistrate.

The young lady bowed.

Mr. Ball then read over the deposition.

"It is quite right," said Lady Volante, and she signed it in the presence of her father, who then affixed his own signature as witness.

The duke then rang for the nurse, and the two gentlemen, leaving Lady Volante in charge of Mrs. Possett, withdrew from the room.

* * * * * * *

At this very hour Young Nan, exasperated by the continued presence of a policeman in her home, rushed out of the ruined tower to seek and upbraid her lover, Red Dennis.

At some little distance down the dike she met the man, who was waiting for her.

"You have not found anybody yet willing to swear they saw Ham take boat to the coast of France!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

"No. They're afeared o' being prosecuted for parjury. But here's a go—the rummest go! I just come off to tell you!" laughed the man.

"I don't care for no go but the peelers going out of my house!" exclaimed Nan, in a resentful tone.

"Well, they'll go out of it to-day all right."

"What do you mean?"

"You know Jack Abbott and his mates, what sailed from here on the morning of the day the murder was found out?"

"Yes."

"They sailed for the deep-sea fishing. That was ten days ago, and as nothing was heard of 'em up to this morning it was thought they were lost."

"Well?"

"This morning their boat come in, and they heerd of the murder for the first time, and also of the warrant out against Gow and Delaplaine, and the reward offered for their arrest or infomation that might lead to their arrest."

"What of that? Them Methodists wouldn't take a false

oath as they'd seen Ham sail for the coast of France to save all our lives," said Nan spitefully.

"No, that they wouldn't. But they say—and stick to it now—that they took Ham Gow over to the coast of France on the morning of the murder, before anyone had heard anything about it."

"Eh!" exclaimed Nan, in unbounded amazement.

"They say, and they evidently believe, that they carried Ham Gow to the coast of France, and left him there. And now they have gone up to the Hall to give information. So your house will be free of the police in a few hours. And now I must be gone, my girl. Good-by."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE FISHERMEN SAID THEY SAW

News, my masters? The air is filled with news,
The earth doth teem with news. We breathe, eat, drink
Nothing but news! News, quotha? Good, now! News!
—SHAKESPEARE.

"THE Earl of Hawkewood should be informed of this new testimony," said the duke to the magistrate, as they left Lady Volante Belle Isle's room.

"I think so," replied the latter. "We will communicate with him at once."

The two gentlemen went downstairs to the lower hall, where they found the porter and a footman waiting.

"Where is Lord Hawkewood?" inquired the duke of the last-mentioned domestic.

"His lordship is in the library, your grace," replied the footman, touching his forehead with his finger by way of a bow.

"Show us thither," said the duke.

The footman only pointed to his forehead this time, as he turned to lead the way down the lower hall.

He opened a rear door on the left and announced:

"His grace the Duke of Grand Manors, and his worship, Squire Ball."

The two gentlemen entered the library, and the footman closed the door after them and withdrew.

The new Earl of Hawkewood was not availing himself of the wealth of learning in that library, which was famous all over Europe for its rare collections. No, indeed! Lewis Manton, Earl of Hawkewood, was lying on a sofa between two front windows, smoking a well-browned pipe and sipping brandy and water from a glass that stood on a little table by his side.

He arose and laid down his pipe as the two gentlemen entered.

"Good-morning, my lord! I have ventured to intrude on your privacy for a little matter of business," said the magistrate.

"Take a seat, Mr. Ball. Duke, here is a comfortable resting chair for you. Be seated, gentlemen, both," said the earl hospitably.

The visitors sat down.

"I hope Lady Volante is still improving, duke," continued the earl.

"She is better this morning, thanks," replied the latter.

"Anything new in regard to the homicide, or the theft of the corpse, Mr. Ball?" he next inquired.

"Nothing about the body-snatching, but some new evidence in regard to the murder that changes the aspect of affairs very much," replied the magistrate.

"Indeed? What may this new evidence be? And who has brought it forward?" inquired Lord Hawkewood, in evident agitation.

"I will answer your last question first, my lord. Lady Volante Belle Isle has brought forward the new evidence."

"Lady Volante Belle Isle! What on earth could her ladyship know about it?" inquired the earl, with increasing disturbance.

"Just the question the duke and myself asked each other when the young lady volunteered to become a witness. But her ladyship does know a great deal about it—more, probably, than any other human being in the world, with the exception of the criminal who committed the crime."

The Earl of Hawkewood turned around and looked out of the window at the head of the sofa.

"I thought I saw a man coming whom I know," he explained, as he turned again, keeping his back to the light and his face in the shade.

"Lady Volante had occasion to leave her room that night, in search of a lost jewel. In passing the 'bachelors' corridor,' as she went down to the ballroom, she saw the Earl of Hawkewood dismiss the valet and the tramp, and lock his own door after them. This was at about four o'clock in the morning."

"Lady Volante Belle Isle saw this?" exclaimed the earl.

"She did."

"Then I don't see how they could have committed the murder."

"She declares that they did not, and that another person did the deed."

The new earl started involuntarily; and then, controlling himself, he inquired:

"Who does she say committed the murder?"

"She does not know who the man was, though she saw him leaving the earl's room as she was returning to her own after a long search for her diamond."

"How—was—that?" inquired the new Lord Hawkewood, in a quavering tone.

"I had better tell you all about it. It was near four o'clock, remember, when, in going down to the hall, she saw the Earl of Hawkewood let out the valet and the tramp, and lock himself in his room after their departure. Two hours later, at six o'clock, she had found her jewel, but had lost her light, for her candle had burned low, sunk down in the socket and gone out, and she was returning in the dark, when, in passing the archway leading into the 'bachelors' corridor,' she saw, by the light of the moon which shone through a stained-glass bow window at the end opposite the archway, a man emerging from the late earl's room."

"What sort of a man?" inquired the new Lord Hawkewood, in irrepressible agitation.

"A young, fair man, with smooth, beardless chin, clothed in a dark dressing-gown, corder around his waist, and a dark smoking-cap with a gold tassel. He stood for a mo-

ment looking up and down the corridor, with a scared expression, and then closed the door and stole away into the darkness."

The agitation of the new Lord Hawkewood now became almost uncontrollable. He could scarcely steady his voice sufficiently to put the question which he next asked.

"Did her ladyship recognize this man?"

"Why, no, my lord—no! I think I said or hinted as much before. She did not recognize him," replied Mr. Ball.

"Would she know him again if she were to see him?"

"She cannot certainly tell. She says she only saw the lower half of his face—his nose and chin, as she puts it. She says that his dressing-gown collar was turned up to his ears and his smoking-cap was pulled down to his eyebrows. This has distressed you, I fear, my lord," concluded the magistrate, unable longer to ignore the extreme disturbance of the earl.

"Yes, yes, yes," slowly returned his lordship. "Everything relating to that terrible event does greatly disturb me."

At this instant a footman entered the room and said:

"If it please my lord, there are three of the Hawkeville fishermen outside, who beg to see your lordship, or his worship, saying that they have some information to give in regard to the fugitive Ham Gow."

"Ah, indeed! Well, detain them in the servants' hall. Give them a mug of beer each, and when I ring the bell bring them up here," said the earl.

The footman bowed and withdrew.

"Mr. Ball," said the earl, turning to the magistrate, "I suppose this evidence will go far to clear Gow and Delaplaine from the charge of murder."

"This evidence given by Lady Volante Belle Isle, you mean, of course?"

"Yes."

"I should say it would."

"Would it entirely clear them?"

"It might do so. I cannot tell. The valet and the tramp may have returned and committed the murder, after all; and certainly their flight immediately after the event tells strongly against them. On the other hand, the man—

the unknown man—was seen leaving the earl's room, in a state of agitation, two hours after the earl had dismissed the tramp and the valet and locked them out. Now, if this unknown man had nothing to do with the murder, why has he not come forward before this to give evidence as to how he left the earl at six o'clock on the morning of the murder? I tell you, my lord, it looks almost equally black for the valet, the tramp, and the mysterious stranger! They may have been confederates, for that matter. And in that view of the case I do not see that Lady Volante Belle Isle's evidence disproves anything that has been charged against Gow or Delaplaine," concluded the magistrate.

"That is all I wish to ask you, Mr. Ball. And now, if you please, we will have those fishermen in," said the earl, pulling the bell cord.

The footman soon reappeared, ushering in three rude, dark-skinned, elf-locked Cornish fishermen, in blue blouses, duck trousers, and tarpaulin hats.

They doffed these hats and stood holding them down before their knees and bowing before the gentlemen.

"Your names, my men?" demanded the magistrate, drawing his chair up to the library table and arranging paper and pens to take notes.

"Charles Abbott, your worship," said the taller and elder man of the three, advancing. "And these be my mates here—John Miller and Thomas Johnson," he added, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the other two.

"You have some information to give regarding the fugitive, Ham Gow?"

"Yes, your worship," said the speaker.

"Only this, your worship: that he sailed to the coast of France early in the morning after the murder and afore the murder were found out," said Abbott.

"So long ago as that? It has been ten days since. Why have you not given this information before, if it was in your possession?"

" 'Cause, your worship, we didn't know as how Ham Gow had been up to anything at all, or as there was any warrant out agin' him for anythin' when we seen him, and no more

didn't we find out about the murder until this morning, when we landed just below Demondike."

"Why, how was that?"

"Please, your worship, I will tell you all about it. It was on the morning after my lord's birthday ball (Heaven rest my dear lord's soul! I was at the feast in the grounds, and had my fill of roast beef and brown stout, as I allers had it once a year in my lord's lifetime.) Hows'ever, that nyther here nor there, nor anywhere else in what I started to say," muttered the man, scratching his rough, black head.

" 'It was the morning after the festival,' you said," suggested the magistrate.

"Ay, ay, your worship, it were; and it were hardly light when me and my mates were getting ready the boat for the deep-sea fishing, for we were going out with the turn of the tide, when who should come on board in the dusk of the morning but Ham Gow; and says he:

" 'My mates, where be you going?'

" 'Out for the deep-sea fishing,' says I.

" 'If you'll put me across to the coast of France, I will give you five pounds,' says he.

" 'It's out of our way,' spoke up John Miller then.

" 'Then I will give you ten pounds,' says Gow.

" 'It'll take a week, at least, to do it, and that'll put us back in our fishing,' spoke up my t'other mate, Tom Johnson.

" 'All right. Then I'll give you twenty pounds for the job. There.'

" 'Where did you get so much money from, Ham Gow?' I asked.

" 'From the gold fields in Australia, from which I have just returned, you know,' he answered.

"I didn't know it, your worship, but as I knew he had been a wanderer in foreign countries, and as his words seemed to explain everything, I believed him. I had no reason to suspect him of robbery and murder, no more than I have to suspect my honest, vartuous mate here; but I did ask him this:

" 'If so be you're flush of money, Ham Gow, why dunnot you go to a seaport town and take a fine steamer across

water? You'd go quicker and cheaper, and more comfor'ble,' says I.

"'Oh, because I am not pressed for time, and there's more fun in going with you,' says he; 'and, besides, mayhap I want to do an old friend a kindness,' says he.

"Well, your worship, we closed in with his offer and took him off. We set sail about sunrise, before any news from the Hall had reached the coast, and never suspecting that anything was wrong.

"We reached the coast of France the fifth day out, and put our passenger ashore at a little fishing village called St. Rosalie, where we stayed one day. Then we came back, stopping to fish for a few hours until we got a load.

"We reached home this morning, your worship, when we heard for the first time of the murder and robbery at the Hall and of the warrants that were out for Henri Delaplaine and Ham Gow, and the reward that was offered for information that would lead to the arrest of the criminals."

"And we came off immediately to tell your worship," struck in John Miller.

"And not for the sake of the rewards, my lords and gentlemen! We don't want no blood money, which it never prospers in no man's possession," added Thomas Johnson.

"No, we only came to give information about the fugitive from the love we bear our late lord and the sorrow we feel for his death, and for our own foolishness in being beguiled into aiding his murderer to run away. So now, my lords and gentlemen, that is all I have got to tell, and so we will not intrude no longer on your lordships and worships," concluded Abbott, with a bow.

"Stay," said Mr. Ball, who was very methodical—too methodical, perhaps—and he took up his minutes of the information given by Abbott and read it over to the men.

"That's all right," said Abbott.

His mates agreed with him, and all three of the men scrawled their names at the bottom of the paper.

"Now, my friends, a couple of police officers will be sent over to France, armed with a warrant of requistion under the extradition treaty, for the delivery of this fugitive from justice into their hands. And if this information which you have given should lead to his arrest, you will

not miss your reward," said Mr. Ball, as he dismissed the men.

Later that afternoon Young Nan sat in her room in the ruined tower, engaged in patching a red flannel petticoat, and scowling darkly at the policeman who stood leaning his back against the chimney and smoking a short pipe. Nan was also pondering in her mind the strange story told by Abbott and his mates, and repeated to her by Red Dennis. What could be the meaning of it? she asked. These men were not liars. They were men of earnest piety, and of irreproachable character. They had known Ham Gow from his boyhood, and could not well mistake another man for him. Yet they had said, and persisted, that they had taken Ham Gow over to the coast of France, and left him there, although, to Nan's certain knowledge, Ham Gow was at that time, and from that time to the present moment, an invalid and a prisoner in the smugglers' cave at the other end of the secret underground passage.

While she was still pondering over this mystery, and hoping at least that it might be the means of delivering her home from the presence of the police, footsteps were heard crunching over the rocky ground, and another policeman entered the room.

"Glad to be relieved, mate. It is anything but jolly to stand here by the hour to be scowled at by a handsome lass, as you will find it when you take my place. I wouldn't mind it so much if she was ugly, you know. Ugliness and scowls go naturally together," said the first policeman, taking his pipe from his mouth, knocking the ashes out of the bowl and putting it into his pocket. "Whereas handsomeness and smiles should be allers united," he added, slowly and philosophically.

"Hold your scurrilous tongue, you degraded beast! And now that your turn of watching is over, get out of my house before I scald you," fiercely exclaimed Young Nan, seizing the boiling kettle from the fire and threatening him with it.

"With pleasure, dear madam. Robbins, I don't envy you your position!" said the policeman, first turning to Nan, and then to his comrade.

"Oh, but I'm not to take your place! We are off duty at this post for good and all. The quarry isn't here. The

authorities have received certain information that he has fled to the coast of France, and a pair of police officers, armed with a writ of requistion, have already been dispatched in pursuit of him. So, mistress," said Robbins, looking around and addressing Nan, "you are to be relieved of the good company which you did not appreciate while you enjoyed it."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish! Why don't you go?" demanded Nan.

"We are going now," said Robbins.

And they went.

Nan arose and bolted the door after the departing men, and then went to that back window which looked inland toward the Hall and watched them until a fall of the downs hid them from her sight.

Then she dropped down in her chair and gave way to a long fit of laughter—muttering between her paroxysms:

"Escaped to the coast of France, has he? Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! Two peelers with a warrant sent after him, eh? Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! I wonder who it was that old Abbott did take over, anyhow? Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! Couldn't have been our Ham, whoever it was! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! Well, I must now go to see Ham. I have not seen him for more than a week. He may be dead, or in a dying condition. But I do not think so. If he were in such extremity I know mother would risk anything to let me know. But I will satisfy myself at once. Stay, though! I must gather up some provisions to take with me for them, for what they had must be well-nigh exhausted by this time."

So thinking, Young Nan went to her big oaken chest and brought out a long canvas bag, which she proceeded to fill with several bundles of fagots and a loaf of bread, a paper of tea, another of sugar, a bottle of milk, another of brandy, a couple of candles, a tin box of matches, and finally, a roll of clean linen.

When all her preparations were completed she secured the door and window of the strong room, opened the iron trap leading to the secret subterranean passage, and took her way to the cave.

CHAPTER IX

MAD HAM

I have some comfort in this fellow;
He hath no drowning mark upon him.
—SHAKESPEARE.

UP into the great Dutch oven, through the iron trapdoor in the bottom, down the stone steps cut in the thickness of the wall, across the crypt to the concealed entrance of the subterranean passage, along that rugged and tortuous way, went Young Nan, painfully dragging her bundle behind or pushing it before her.

At length she emerged into the spacious cavern, where, on a mattress on the floor, sat Old Nan, with her limbs drawn up, her elbows on her knees, and her chin in the palms of her hands, brooding and scowling, and doing nothing else.

A ray from the afteroon sun striking through the crevice of the inaccessible cliffs above fell on the red handkerchief and blue gown that she wore, and on the gay, parti-colored quilt over the mattress where she sat, making a bright oasis of colors in the brown gloom of the cavern.

"Where is Ham?" demanded Young Nan, in sudden alarm at not seeing the young man.

"He has walked off to a short distance. He will be here presently. But a pretty time you have been away!" exclaimed Old Nan resentfully.

"Oh, I am so glad that poor Ham is able to walk at all! He is better, then, of course? Oh, I am so relieved! I have been so anxious! I did not know how I should find him. I feared I might even find him dying or—dead!" said Young Nan, totally ignoring the reproaches of the old woman.

"No thanks to you, nor to Dennis Prout, that he isn't dead! Here have we been for nine days without the sight of a human being! We should have been without food or drink, or light or fire, if it had not been for my forethought in providing them!" growled the old woman.

"I thought Dennis Prout had brought these necessaries down here?" coolly observed the young one.

"Where did he get 'em? Where did he get 'em but out'n my store in the tower? And you're not answering of my questions, nuther! I asks you where you have been and what you have been a-doing of, all this time, that you have never come a-nigh us, but left us alone for nine days, suffering from unsartainty and anxiousness to that extent as I was on the p'int a many times of risking everything and going up to the tower to see what ailed you, as you nor Dennis never came a-nigh us!"

"If you had, you would have ruined us all! You would have been arrested. We should all have been imprisoned; the secret passage to the cave discovered; the contraband goods seized; the smuggling band brokn up, and—Ham would have been hanged for a crime he never could have committed," gravely replied Young Nan.

"Then if there was so much danger from my coming up into the tower, why didn't you awide the chance of it by coming down to tell us?" fiercely demanded Old Nan.

"Because the tower was in the possession of the police, from the day you left it until this day. A policeman was on guard in the strong room all the time, and never left it until he was relieved by another policeman."

"What! Night as well as day?"

"Yes, night as well as day."

"Humph!"

"I could not have left the tower by the secret passage without their knowledge, which would have been ruin to us all, as I have explained. But here comes Ham!"

So saying, Young Nan broke off in her discourse and ran to meet the tramp, who was now coming into sight through the distant shadows of the cave.

"Oh, Ham, my dear, I am so glad that you are alive!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around him.

"I had a thick skull, a strong constitution, and a first-rate, incomparable doctress. That's about how it was, Nan!" gayly answered the young man, as he seated himself on the mattress—the only seat in the cave.

"And no bothering neighbors a-coming in to disturb him

by asking how he was. When I got him to sleep, he slept. That's what did it!" cried Old Nan.

"Why haven't you been to see us before?" inquired Ham.

"It was impossible for me to do so without bringing destruction upon you," replied Young Nan, who thereupon gave the same explanation of her absence to Ham Gow that she had already given to Old Nan.

"And so the peelers have had possession of the tower until to-day, watching for me to appear upon the scene, eh?" chuckled Ham.

"Yes, they have, burn 'em!" blazed Nan.

"Did they suspect any such thing as a secret passage from the tower?"

"I don't think they did. Leastways they never looked for one; they sat and smoked in the strong room and watched slyly through the window and door as if they expected you from the outside. May the demon roast them!"

"And since I didn't appear to bless their longing eyes, what took them off to-day—despair of my return?"

Here Nan's whole manner changed and she burst into a loud, long laugh.

"I'd like to know what's all that about?" questioned the young man, while Nan laughed and laughed and laughed, and continued to laugh and never ceased from laughing.

"Don't you see, you fool, that she has done 'em in some way or another? Nan's a clever wench! How did ye do the peelers, Nan?" queried the old woman.

"I didn't do 'em, mother; they did themselves, with the help of Abbott and his crew," Nan stopped for a moment to answer, and then she pealed out laughing again.

"Maybe when you're done playing the fool, you'll tell us what you mean," snarled the old woman.

"I can't help it, mother! Oh, if you knew, you wouldn't wonder. I'm overcome with the fun of it! You'd be so yourself! But I'll tell you now! You must know that me and Dennis Prout did put our heads together to do the police and get 'em out of the house for good."

"There, I said it was you!" exclaimed Old Nan.

"But it wasn't us! We only put our heads together and tried to do 'em, but we couldn't. We tried to get some of the boys to go up to the great Hall and swear that they had

seen Ham Gow on the morning of the murder sail away in a fishing smack for the coast of France."

"A good dodge!" put in Ham.

"Yes, but we couldn't get anybody to do it! Dennis himself would a done it in a minute, only, you see, he had already given in his evidence at the crowner's 'quest, as how he hadn't seen Ham Gow anywhere, and didn't know as he had come back to the neighborhood, and so he couldn't go and contradict himself then by saying as he had seen Ham Gow sail away in a fishing smack for the coast of France! You see, Dennis couldn't do that, and as for the others, they wouldn't—they was too cowardly."

"Well, then, how did you get rid of the peelers?" impatiently demanded Ham.

"I am telling you as fast as I can. You know Abbott's crew?"

"Them canting Wesleyans? Yes, I do."

"Well, then, on the morning of the murder they sailed at sunrise for the deep-sea fishing. And they never got back until this morning."

"Eh! Why, what happened them?" demanded the old woman.

"I am going to tell you," said Young Nan. "Abbott's boat was gone so long—full ten days, you know—that fears were felt she was lost; but this morning she landed with a good load of fish. And what do you think of the news they brought, and where do you think they had been?"

"How should I know?" crossly demanded the old woman.

"Where?" inquired Ham.

"They had been to the coast of France, to carry off Ham Gow, the tramp, who paid them twenty golden guineas for the job."

"Eh!" screamed Old Nan.

"What!" cried the young man.

"Be you drunk or luny, wench?" demanded the old woman, and——

"Were they lying to get the reward?" questioned Ham Gow in the same instant.

"No, mother, I am neither drunk nor luny, I am sane and sober as I always have been, and always mean to be!

Nor were these men lying, Ham! They are fanatic Wesleyans, but they are not hypocrites. They say, and swear to it, that they took Ham Gow to the coast of France and left him at the little fishing village of St. Rosalie, and that he gave them twenty pounds for the job—or twenty guineas, I disremember which. But there's not much differ. And they say that they never suspicioned Ham Gow had been up to anything unlawful, or they never would have taken him off. And they say, besides, as when they arrove here and heered about the murder of the young earl, and the warrant out agin' Ham Gow, their conscience wouldn't let them have any peace till they goed up to the great Hall and told my lord and his reverence and his lordship all about it."

Ham Gow clasped his knees, fell back on the mattress and gave vent to a slow, long—

"Whe-e-e-e-ew!"

"Now, Ham, you know these men wouldn't lie."

"How do I know, Nan? They might want to get the reward!" laughed the tramp.

"You know they would not lie for money or for anything else! Besides, they have declared that they will not accept any reward for this information—any blood-money, as they call it, which they insist could never prosper in theirs or any man's hands. No, Ham, these men have really taken some one over to France whom they suppose to be you. Now, Ham Gow, who is it that they took to France?" demanded Young Nan.

A sudden light of intelligence broke over the young man's face, but was quickly masked by an assumed expression of perplexity, as he slowly raised himself up into a sitting position, took his head between his hands and metaphorically put on his considering-cap.

"Now, who was it that Abbott and his mates took over to France?" impatiently demanded Young Nan.

"It must have been me!" said the tramp, slowly nodding his head. "Yes, it must have been me, since they say so, and they never lie. It must—in fact—have been me!"

"Nonsense, Ham! How can you make such game of a grave matter! Tell us who it was that these men took over to France!" demanded the young woman.

"Blamed if I know!" said the tramp, lifting his head with a perfectly helpless and idiotic look.

"How should he know? Was he there to see? Don't be a fool, Nan. It was likely some one that looked like Ham, and that passed himself off for Ham, so that they took him as such! There was the young Earl of Hawkewood, used to be the very fetch of Ham, when they was both boys, as he had good reason to be. Now, it might have been the Earl of Hawkewood as they took over, only that they sailed at sunrise, you say, and the young earl was found dead in his bed at noon the same day! So it couldn't 'a' been him, anyhow!" concluded Old Nan.

"No, evidently it couldn't 'a' been him! He couldn't 'a' been sailing across the seas between England and France and lying dead in his bed at the very same time, eh?" said the tramp.

"Let alone the facts, as, if he'd 'a' been alive and well, he'd got no cause to go over the seas in a oncomfortable, rolling, sickening, little sailboat, bad enough to make the best sailor heave his stomach overboard," added Young Nan.

"Certainly, what call should a nobleman have to put himself to such ill-convenience? Of course, it could not have been my lord, even supposing he had been alive, when we all know that he was dead," said the tramp.

"Who could it have been?" muttered Nan, returning to the previous question.

"Since it wasn't me and couldn't have been my lord, blamed if I know who it was!" replied Ham, with the same assumption of imbecility.

"It was a good job for you, whoever it was," exclaimed the old woman.

"Ah, you may say that! And I mean to take advantage of it by leaving this place by the first of our vessels that sails from this coast!"

"Ham, you must now give me some satisfaction about yourself and your wound, and that suit of fine undercloth-ing you wore when you reeled into the tower on the morn-ing after the inquest and sank down in a fainting fit. Ham, you were the last to see the young Earl of Hawkewood alive on the morning of his murder. It was proved by several

witnesses at the inquest that you went to his room by appointment at half-past three o'clock in the morning, and no one saw him alive afterward!"

"They didn't?" cried the tramp, with a strange twist of his mouth that suggested the suppression of a laugh.

"No, they did not."

"That makes it look black for me."

"It does! Now, Ham, I want you to begin with your going to the young earl's room and tell me everything that occurred to you from that moment to the moment when you reeled into the tower covered with blood and fell fainting n the floor."

"Nan, I tell you, as I have told the old woman here, that my interview with the earl covers a profound secret that I have sworn never to reveal except under certain circumstances. But I will tell you this much for your satisfaction —that we two—the great earl and the poor tramp—spent two hours together on the best of terms, and that we parted about five o'clock the very best of friends. You believe me?"

"And you had no altercation, no struggle, no fight with the earl?"

"No, Nan, of course not. Can't you believe me?"

"Yes, I can, and do believe you! But how did you get hurt, Ham?"

The tramp reflected for a moment, and then replied:

"I received that blow while saving the young earl's life."

"Saving the young earl's life!" echoed both women in one breath.

"Yes," answered the tramp.

"Why—when did you save his life?" demanded Young Nan, while Old Nan listened in dumfounded amazement.

"About an hour after we had parted."

"Gracious goodness! You ought to have given this evidence in at the inquest! Who attempted his life? How did you happen to be at hand to rescue him? Did you hear him cry for help? And when you saved his life, why didn't you kill his assailant? Why didn't you alarm the house? Why didn't you stay with the earl all the night? Why did you leave him alone there to be assassinated, after all? Why did you?"

"'Why did you?' 'Why didn't you?' Look here, Nan, I am not going to say another word about that night. It was a night of mysteries, whose secrets I am sworn to keep!" said the tramp, with much emphasis.

"Where did you get that fine suit of underclothes, then? You can tell me that!" said Young Nan angrily.

"No, indeed, I cannot. That is another mystery!" returned the tramp.

"You got that wound on the night or morning you saved the young earl's life—for a little while—that was twenty-four hours before you reeled into this tower and fell fainting on the floor. Now, Ham Gow, where did you pass the time between the minutes you got hurt and the minute you stumbled into the tower and fell down on the floor? Tell me that!" said Nan, in a voice of authority.

"That is another mystery, and the deepest mystery of all. If I were to tell you that, I should give you the key of a room as full of secrets as Bluebeard's chamber—secrets I am sworn not to divulge. Come, Nan! You have brought something comfortable in that sack of yours. Let us have supper, that is a good woman. But oh! I say—has the earl's body been found yet?"

"No, it has not. Great rewards have been offered for it, but all in vain. They get no trace."

"That is odd, too. They charged me with having murdered the Earl of Hawkewood. Now, while they are about it, why did they not charge me with having walked off with his dead body? One charge was quite as reasonable and a little more probable than the other!" exclaimed Ham with a chuckle.

Meanwhile Nan was untying the mouth of the canvas sack and taking out the treasures she had brought.

"Fagots! I'm glad of them, anyway. The old woman hasn't had a cup of tea for two days just because we had no means of making a fire to boil water," exclaimed Ham, as Old Nan seized the bundle of chips and the box of matches and began to kindle a fire on the rocky ground of the cavern.

"It is well the food held out," said Nan.

"Oh, yes, such as it was. Ship biscuit and smoked beef! —Give me the kettle, granny, and I'll fill it."

And so saying, the young man carried off the little copper vessel to the spring before mentioned and brought it back full to the brim.

Old Nan set a three-legged iron stand over the fire and put the kettle on it, while Young Nan spread out a table-cloth on the ground and arranged upon it the bread, milk, meat, and other viands she had brought down from the tower.

They had to make the tea in the teakettle, and then they had to take turns in drinking it from one cup, for the housekeeping resources of the cave were not extensive.

"And now, mother," said Young Nan, when the supper was ended, the few utensils washed and put away, "I think I will relieve guard by staying here with Ham to-night and letting you go up and get a good, comfortable sleep in your own bed."

"Not if I know it; you will not stay here with Ham to-night!" broke in the young man. "What! do you think I am going to spend the rest of my life, or even one more night, in this cavern? Thunder! Why, one might as well be in limbo in one place as another! What is the difference between this and the county jail, if I can't get out of it?"

"This difference," sharply retorted Young Nan: "Your confinement here will end in escape. Your confinement in the jail would end on the gallows!"

"Ur-r-r-r-rh! Don't talk of such grewsome things, Nan!" exclaimed Ham, with a pretended snarl and shudder.

"Don't you talk nonsense, then! You must stay here until to-morrow night. Dennis Prout will have this beat. Pierre Moreau will run a cargo of brandy and cigars ashore, and he can then take you off in his vessel, *La Belle Femme.*"

"Eh! Is the *Bellfam* off Demondike?" inquired Old Nan.

"She's nowhere else. And Moreau will run a cargo in to-morrow night while Red Dennis has the watch," answered Young Nan.

"Ah!" chuckled Ham Gow. "What would you smugglers do if it wa'n't for the coastguard?"

The sarcasm seemed lost on the two women, for Old Nan

answered quite gravely: "What should we, sure enough?" While Young Nan said never a word.

Ham Gow then walked off to a remote part of the cavern to change his "linen." And when this was done Mrs. Crook made a bundle of his soiled clothing and took it off with her when she left the cavern for the strong room in the tower.

Old Nan was very glad to get back to her own home.

On emerging from the opening of the secret passage she proceeded to strike a light and kindle a fire, and to make herself generally comfortable.

Then she opened the door and looked out. The sun had just set, and in the west the sea and sky were both aflame with the afterglow. Th tide was in, and very high, and Demondike was roaring and foaming like a cataract. But not a human being was in sight.

Old Nan seated herself on the doorsill, partly to enjoy the evening, which was unusually warm for the middle of September, and partly to watch for any chance appearance of Red Dennis, whom she wished to question on the subject of *La Belle Femme*, and the smuggler, Moreau.

She sat there watching until the last faint light died in the west, and the shadow of darkness crept over the earth.

Then feeling the chill of the night air, she turned into the house, and locked the door.

Finally she made a large mug of strong brandy toddy, and drank it all, and betook herself to bed.

Now, whether it was the brandy, the fatigue, or the feather bed, or all together, we cannot tell, but no sooner had Old Nan settled her head upon the pillow, and drawn her blankets up over her shoulders, than she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, that lasted all night and late into the next morning.

CHAPTER X

CONFLICTING TESTIMONY

I think there be six Richmonds in the field,
Five have I slain already. —SHAKESPEARE.

How much longer she might still have slept is uncertain had she not been roused up suddenly by a hearty shaking, and the voice of Young Nan calling in her ears:

"Mother! Mother! Wake up! Be you gwine to sleep yourself to death?"

"Ah-h-h! Yah-h-h! What's the matter? Who is it, Ham?" yawned the old woman, rubbing her eyes.

"Wake up, mother! Don't you know where you are?"

"Oh! Yes! Sure—I remember now! I came back up here last night, and left you with Ham, didn't I? Oh, but I was very sound asleep when you called me," said Old Nan, throwing off the cover, and stepping out of bed.

"Mother, are you wide awake now? Can you understand me?" demanded the young woman.

"Of course I am wide awake, and I understand every word you say to me. But what I can't understand is, why you are here! You know it is dangerous for you to come through the secret passage out into this room without first knowing who is in it. S'pose I had been up and some stranger had been here, and had seen you come out of that old oven? S'pose that!"

"Mother, I was obliged to come. Ham's gone!" exclaimed Young Nan, wringing her hands in distress.

"What? Ham gone? What did you let him go for? Where is the fool gone?" slowly demanded the old woman, holding her linsey gown suspended in her hands while she put the questions.

"Oh, mother, yes, he is gone, but I did not let him go, and I don't know where he's gone!" cried Young Nan.

"How is that?" asked the old woman, as she slowly put on her clothes.

"Oh, mother, Ham gave me his mattress and rolled himself in a blanket at the other end of the cave; and that was

the last I saw of him. I went to sleep, and I must have slept very soundly, for when I woke up this morning he had gone!"

"Are you sure he is gone?"

"Certain! I have searched the cave from one end to the other, calling him at the top of my voice."

"Then he must be gone, sure enough, the impatient, ungrateful cub! He'll be took and hung, and serve him just right, the thankless whelp!" cried the old woman, in equal wrath and fear.

"And, mother, see here! See here! You fastened this door as usual before you went to bed," said Young Nan, pointing in the direction of which she spoke.

"Did I ever leave it unfastened since we had it put up?" inquired Old Nan.

"Well, you see now the door is not only unlocked and unbolted, but it is ajar!"

"E!" cried Old Nan indignantly.

"The door is ajar—just as Ham must have left it when he went out!"

"The young villyun! Oh, won't he get his deserts!" screamed Mrs. Crook.

"Oh, mother, don't put any bad wishes on poor Ham! I'm nearly crazy now with fright for fear he'll be took!" pleaded Young Nan.

"It's that girl he's after—that Lona Pond!" cried the old woman wrathfully. "I know! He'll watch and wait and risk his neck to see her before he gets off from the country!"

"Oh, if only the real murderer of the earl could be found so that poor Ham might stay in England and be safe! For even if he 'scapes being took and gets safe out of the country, I shall never see him again—never, never! My poor boy is lost to me in any case, unless the real murderer can be found!" cried Young Nan, dropping into a chair and beginning to rock herself backward and forward as she sobbed.

"Hush howling! Ham'll be all right, though he don't deserve it. The peelers ain't a-looking for him around here! They've gone for him to the coast of France! He'll prowl around Stony Fells until he sees that girl and bids

her good-by and then he will sneak over here to-night in time to get away in Moreau's vessel. He will go to the West Indies, and what's to hinder us a j'ining on him there after a bit? Come, girl! Get breakfast, and don't holler out till you're hurt!" said Old Nan, as she went to the cupboard and uncorked the brandy bottle and put the neck to her mouth to take her morning dram.

It was said of Old Nan that she could drink more liquor, with less effect, than any man on the coast.

Nan was somewhat comforted by the words of the old woman, and she went about her work more cherfully.

But the day passed, evening came and waned, but no Ham returned to the tower.

Nan despaired.

"In the dead waste and middle of the night"

—a moonless, starless, overclouded, dismal night—*La Belle Femme* crept into the mouth of Demondike and ran a cargo of St. Croix spirits and Havana cigars, which were carried to the ruined tower and deposited in the smugglers' cave to wait for a favorable opportunity to be disposed of.

And Capt. Pierre Moreau sailed again, but he sailed without Ham Gow.

Meanwhile, where was the tramp?

The reports of his whereabouts, which were received at the Hall and at police headquarters, were somewhat conflicting.

Three "good men and true"—Abbott, Johnson, and Miller—had given information, as we know, that they took him on board their boat, on the morning of the murder, and conveyed him from Hawkeville, on the coast of Cornwall, to St. Rosalie, on the coast of Normandy, where they left him; while at the same time, Red Dennis, Old Nan and Young Nan could have testified, had they chosen to do so, that Ham Gow lay, dangerously wounded, then in the smugglers' cave at Demondike.

Nor were these the only contradictory and bewildering circumstances in regard to the fugitive's movements, as we shall soon see.

On the same morning of Ham Gow's sudden flight from

the smugglers' cave, another startling piece of intelligence was received at the Hall, in direct controversion of the fishermen's statement concerning his escape to France.

On that morning, Mr. Ball, the magistrate, was closeted with the earl in the handsome library of Hawkewood.

They were talking on the endless theme of the mysterious murder of the late earl on the morning after his birthnight ball and of the still more mysterious theft of the body on the night after the inquest.

"No clue has as yet been obtained to the bodysnatchers. If the young medical students were the guilty parties they have done their work so effectually as to leave no trace of their action behind them! But, thank Heaven, we have now a sure clue to the fugitive murderer," the earl was saying, in a cheerful tone, for his lordship had wonderfully recovered his spirits within the last few days.

"Yes! Yes, indeed! We shall have him back here in less than a week! He may have gone on to Paris in the hope of losing himself and spending his booty in that great, overcrowded city; but Lord bless you! the French detectives would in that case unearth him in twenty-four hours!" replied Mr. Ball.

"Well! What do you want?" demanded the earl of an obtrusive footman who entered the library at this moment.

The man advanced respectfully and held out a silver salver on which lay a visiting-card.

The earl screwed his eyeglass, which he affectedly wore, into his right eye, and squinted at the card.

"The Rev. George—no, Paul—'Rev. Paul Traverse'.—Ah, yes! Your steward's nephew that used to be curate here, under old Singleton, and left him last year to take a poor charge in Bermondsey! Let us see, he has written something here in pencil—I wish fellows would write with a pen and ink or a good black pencil, distinctly," continued the earl, as he squinted more closely at the card, and finally said—" 'Impertinent'—No! 'Important information to communicate in regard to the fugitive murderer.' Ah, indeed! Let him ome in! Show the parson up, Stepney."

The footman bowed and left the room.

"It is doubtful if his information can be of any use to

us now, but we must hear it all the same, I suppose," said the earl, with a questioning glance toward his companion.

"Of course! Oh, of course! Without a doubt! He may just have come from Paris and may have met and recognized him there or in some other French town or city. We must see him, by all means," answered the magistrate.

At this moment the door was opened and the Rev. Paul Traverse was announced by the footman, who then withdrew.

The two gentlemen rose to receive the tall, thin, gray-haired man who advanced toward them.

"Happy to see you, Mr. Traverse! Pray be seated! You know my neighbor, Mr. Ball?" said the earl, offering his hand.

"Thanks, my lord. Yes, I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ball. How do you do, sir?" said the visitor, shaking hands with both gentlemen and seating himself at the table.

The earl and the magistrate resumed their own places, and Mr. Ball opened the business of the hour by saying:

"We understand that you have some information to give in regard to the fugitive from justice, Ham Gow."

"Yes, sir, I have positive information to give—to my very great sorrow," replied the curate.

"To your very great sorrow, Mr. Traverse! How should that be? I should suppose that you would think it to be your bounden duty to assist in bringing that deeply-dyed criminal to justice?" exclaimed the earl.

"And so I do, my lord. I hold it to be my bounden duty, but I feel it to be a most sorrowful one! I have known the young man from his boyhood up. He was a pupil in my Sunday-school class. I could not have believed him capable of committing a crime!" sighed the minister.

"But you have doubtless read the report of the inquest, and you can have no doubt of his guilt now?" put in the magistrate.

"I have read the evidence and I have no doubt of his guilt. If I had the least doubt I should not assist in bringing him to justice, or rather to a trial, for it might not have been justice."

"We will waive this discussion and proceed at once to facts. What information have you to give, sir?" inquired

the magistrate, drawing writing materials before him to take down the notes.

"I am coming to that," said the curate. "The murder was committed on the morning of the second of September, I believe."

"Yes, in the very early morning, before day," replied Mr. Ball.

"When was it first discovered, if you please?"

"About one o'clock in the afternoon; for we all slept late after the birthnight ball, and did not assemble to breakfast until about noon. Then we waited for the earl some time before Dr. Laude sent to have him called. Then the young earl was found dead in his bed."

"At what time was the inquest held, the verdict rendered, and the warrants issued for the apprehension of Gow and his accomplice? Forgive me for troubling you with these questions, but I have reasons."

"The inquest was held late that afternoon. The verdict was rendered late at night. The warrants were then immediately issued and placed in the hands of the officers, who, however, were unable to do much with them until the next morning."

"The morning of the third of September."

"Exactly."

"Now, then. I had been down in this neighborhood on a visit to my uncle, his lordship's steward, for a week. On the morning of the second of September—the morning on which the murder was committed—and probbaly about two or three hours after it was committed—I took the seven A. M. train from the Hawkeville station to London. I rode in the third-class carriage as a matter of economy, and—I sat beside Ham Gow, as a matter of chance, all the way to town."

"What!" exclaimed the earl and the magistrate in a breath, as they stared at the parson and then at each other.

"I say, I rode with Ham Gow and talked with him all the way from Hawkeville Station to London, on the morning of the second of September. What is there so marvelous in the assertion to make you stare so?" demanded the curate.

"Mr. Traverse, will you please repeat that?" said the magistrate.

The minister complied with his request.

"You say that you, Mr. Paul Traverse, rode with Ham Gow from Hawkeville Station to London on September second, the morning of the Earl of Hawkewood's murder?" again demanded the amazed magistrate, while the new earl gazed at the curate in no less astonishment.

"I do, most distinctly," repeated that gentleman.

"Do you know Ham Gow?" inquired the earl.

"Just as well as I know anyone else in the world."

"Are you sure it was he?"

The parson smiled sadly as he answered:

"Why, certainly, it is quite impossible for me to be mistaken in him. But what is there so very surprising in the fact of his escaping on the morning of the murder by the early train to London and in the chance of my being his companion on the journey?" inquired the parson, whose curiosity was aroused.

"Oh, nothing, my friend—nothing but what we will explain presently. Now tell us, however, if you rode from Hawkeville Station to London, on the morning of the murder, with Gow, why, when you heard of the murder, and of the warrant that was out against Gow—as you must have done the next day—did you not hasten to give this information?" sternly demanded the magistrate.

"Let me continue my statement and you will understand why. On reaching London I learned from Gow that he was to sail for Australia that day. Having some idle hours on my hands I went down with him to the docks that I might witness what was to me a novel sight, the clearing of an emigrant ship for her outward-bound voyage."

"And you saw Ham Gow off to Australia?"

"I saw him off to Australia. Then I went down to my lodgings in Bermondsey, and within an hour afterward I received a telegram calling me to the town of St. Julie in the South of France, where my married sister, my only sister, lay ill unto death. I went and remained with her until she passed away, leaving her orphan daughter in my charge. After the funeral I brought the girl to England and to my home in Bermondsey. We arrived only yester-

day morning. Yesterday noon, on looking over the two weeks' file of papers, I learned for the first time of the murder of the young Earl of Hawkewood on the morning of the second of September, and of the verdict of the inquest which charged Ham Gow with the crime. I instantly remembered that it was on the same morning on which I started with him by the early train from Hawkeville to London. Gentlemen, I lost no time. I hastened to the station and took the first train to Hawkeville, where I arrived this morning. I came immediately out here. Could I have done better?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Travers, you could not," replied the new earl, who had listened with grave respect to the explanation of the minister.

"And I heartily beg your pardon, reverend sir, for my implied criticism of your conduct. And I am sure Lord Hawkewood joins me in earnest sympathy with you," said the magistrate gravely.

"Indeed, I do," murmured the earl.

The curate bowed deeply, and took his hat from the floor and arose as if to depart.

"Nay, nay, pray sit a little longer. I have some questions which I would like to ask you," said Mr. Ball.

"And we would like to have you stop and dine and take a bed here to-night," added the earl.

"Thanks, but I must return to London to-night," replied the curate, as he resumed his seat.

"Now answer me, Mr. Traverse, for this is a very serious question: Are you positively certain that you know Ham Gow, and that it was himself and no other who sat by your side and rode with you all the way from Hawkeville Station to London on the morning of the murder?"

"I am positively certain. I said so before."

"And could you swear to that fact?"

"I will swear to it. You are a justice of the peace, Mr. Ball. Administer the usual oath. I will take it willingly."

"It is not necessary. I feel sure that you believe what you state."

"I feel sure that I know what I state."

"And you say that you saw Gow on board the Australian ship?"

"I saw Ham Gow sail in the ship *Golden Path* for Australia. But what is there, I would ask again, in all this that you should regard it with astonishment and incredulity?" inquired the curate.

"Well, I will tell you now. But first—you know Charles Abbott and his mates, Miller and Johnson—old fishermen here?"

"Of course I know them—good, conscientious Christian men, though they do prefer the Wesleyan to the Established Church."

"You would believe them under oath?"

"I would take the simple word of either of them, as soon as I would the oath of any other man."

"Very well, then. These truthful, reliable men have made a statement under oath that they have known Ham Gow familiarly all his life, and that at sunrise on the second of September, the morning of the murder, they took him, Ham Gow, on board their boat and sailed with him for the coast of France, and that they left him there at the little fishing village of St. Rosalie."

The curate seemed thunderstruck at this statement of the magistrate, and sat staring stupidly in his face.

"But what do the men mean?" he inquired, as soon as he could speak. "Ham Gow could not have been sailing with them to France while he was riding with me to London!"

"Obviously not! And here is the perplexity. Both of you—the fishermen's party, who swear that they took him to France on the second of September, and you, who state that he rode with you to London, on that date, are perfectly reliable men, who have known the tramp all his life. Now, which of you is right?"

Neither of them was right, as it soon seemed; for before any reply could be made, the door was again opened by a footman, who announced:

"Dr. Ellis," and withdrew.

Dr. Ellis, a slight, dark-complexioned, middle-aged man, with brown hair and a full beard, into which silver threads had begun to mingle, advanced into the room, looking pale and agitated.

The three gentlemen arose quickly, with questioning looks.

"Forgive this intrusion, but I have important testimony to give in relation to the fugitive from justice, Ham Gow, whom I have met face to face this morning!" exclaimed the doctor, dropping into the nearest vacant chair.

"Eh!" cried the magistrate, staring.

"What!" exclaimed the minister, staring.

"The deuce you say!" remarked the earl, whistling.

"Yes! you may wonder, but it is a fact! I was in the neighborhood of Stony Fells, where I had been up all night with a patient. I was on my way home, about sunrise, when I came suddenly upon Ham Gow!"

"Where? where!" cried the three gentleman, in a breath.

"In the private road leading from the turnpike at Stony Fells. He recognized me, but tried to pretend he did not; but when I called upon him, in the name of the queen, to give himself up to the law, he laughed in my face, and asked:

" 'How long have you been a bumbailie, doctor, and where is your warrant?'

"I then jumped off my horse; but before I was quite free he turned and fled into the thick woods by the roadside.

"I followed him, but in vain. He was completely lost in the wilderness of trees.

"After a long search I came out of the woods, remounted my horse and rode on to the police station to lodge the information. Then I came on here."

"Dr. Ellis, are you sure that the man you met was Ham Gow?" inquired the magistrate.

"Absolutely sure. But why do you all look so amazed?"

"Because there seems to be three Ham Gows."

CHAPTER XI

THE THREE MYSTERIES

A mystery?—Ay, sir, a mystery,
It is a mystery, I have heard say.
—SHAKESPEARE.

"THREE Ham Gows? Three tramps, three fugitive murderers, of the same name and form? Impossible! and yet it would seem so, since three distinct parties, equally reliable, have sworn to this man's presence in three distinct places, at the same time," said the magistrate, slowly and with a perplexed look.

"Recount the circumstances, Mr. Ball if you please; it is all very puzzling," observed Dr. Ellis thoughtfully.

"We have received three separate and conflicting statements, three pieces of reliable information, all equally trustworthy, yet each contradicting the others," interpolated the earl.

"Reliable information the first," resumed the magistrate, "was brought to us by Charles Abbott, a man of unquestionable integrity, who has known our tramp from his infancy, and who swears that early on the morning of the murder he took Ham Gow on board his fishing smack and sailed with him for the coast of France, where a few days later he left him at the little fishing village of St. Rosalie; and his testimony is supported by that of his two mates, Jack Miller and Tom Johnson."

"Humph!" exclaimed Mr. Traverse and Dr. Ellis, in a breath.

"Reliable information the second," pursued the magistrate, "comes from this reverend gentleman here, whose rectitude is above question, and flatly contradicts the first. He also has known our tramp from his infancy, and he solemnly declares that early on the morning of the murder he rode with Ham Gow on the railway train from Hawkeville Station to London, saw him on board the *Golden Path* and saw him sail for Australia."

"Humph!" said Dr. Ellis meditatively.

"Reliable information the third is offered by you, whose

veracity is above suspicion, and it flatly contradicts the other two. You, likewise, have known this ubiquitous tramp since his childhood, and you state that you met him face to face, on the road from Stony Fells to Demondike, and you cannot be mistaken, because you know Ham Gow as well as you know your own self," concluded the magistrate, with a little subtle sarcasm in his tone.

"No, I cannot be mistaken in the man; but the other two parties are so. Gow is neither on the coast of France nor on his way to Australia. He is in this county of Cornwall and neighborhood of Hawkeville," replied Dr. Ellis, ignoring the sarcasm.

"What do you say to this, reverend sir?" demanded the magistrate, turning with a smile to the minister.

"I say, with all respect to Dr. Ellis, that he must be in error. He met some man in the woodland path in the early morning who may have resembled Gow, and whom he must have taken for Gow, but who could not have been he, because I traveled with him from Hawkeville to London; was in his company several hours, and saw him off to Australia by the *Golden Path*. Therefore, of course, he is neither in France nor in England, but a few thousand miles away on his voyage to Melbourne," positively concluded Mr. Traverse.

"Satisfactory and consistent, upon my word!" said the earl, once more breaking into the conversation.

"Capping Abbott to see your lordship on business," said the footman, putting his head in at the door.

"Ah! in a good hour. Here is informer the first. Let us see what he will have to say. Let him come in," said the earl.

The servant admitted the fisherman, and closed the door behind him.

Abbott entered the library, bowed, and stood respectfully holding his tarpaulin hat with both hands before him.

"Ah! Abbott. Glad to see you, my man! "exclaimed Mr. Ball. "Don't know what your business is, but before you enter upon it tell us if you still hold to your story of having taken Ham Gow over to the coast of France?"

"Why, sir," began the fisherman, opening his eyes and staring with ever-increasing astonishment, "it wa'n't a

story; it were the sacred, solemn truth, if it was the last word I had to speak."

The physician and the minister smiled with superior intelligence.

"I have no doubt you think so, Abbott, but may not you have been mislead to that opinion by some resemblance?" demanded the magistrate.

"Hoot-toot, your worship! Hain't I known the lad since he was a bairn in arms?"

"Still, you may have been deceived by a strong likeness. Such things have been."

"But, your worship, I was in his company day and night for five days on board my craft. I couldn't have been deceived all that time, if at all!" remonstrated the fisherman.

Not likely," admitted the magistrate.

"I think the weight of probability is with the fisherman, gentlemen, with all due reverence to your opinions be it said. For see: You, Dr. Ellis, saw a man for a few minutes whom you are ready to swear was Ham Gow, the tramp, the alleged murderer of the late Earl of Hawkewood."

"Yes," said the physician decidedly.

"And you, Mr, Traverse, traveled with a man for a few hours whom you are ready to swear was this same Ham Gow."

"I do swear it," replied the minister emphatically.

"That is better evidence than Ellis', for, whereas Ellis saw his man only for a few minutes, you saw yours and talked with him for a few hours."

"I did, most assuredly," said the curate.

"But you, Mr. Abbott, saw and talked, ate, drank, slept, and lived with your man for several days on board your little fishing smack."

"I did that, your honor," replied the fisherman.

"Then, again, begging these gentlemen's pardon, I think the weight of probability is with your statement. Still, steps should be taken in all these directions. Officers armed with a warrant have already gone to France."

"That's the point, your honor!" interpolated the fisherman.

"Lost time and labor!" exclaimed the parson and the doctor, in a breath.

"Another officer must be sent with a warrant to Australia. It is a long way, but such an atrocious murderer must be brought to justice, even if he has to be brought from the uttermost parts of the earth."

"Assuredly," assented the minister.

"A perfect wild-goose chase!" exclaimed the doctor, and the fisherman nodded agreement with the opinion.

"And, finally, detectives must scour the country around Demondike and Stony Fells," concluded the magistrate.

"Ah! now you are speaking sensibly at last!" exclaimed Dr. Ellis.

"You won't find him in this country!" cried the minister and the fisherman in a breath.

"Because he is on the South Atlantic Ocean by this time," added the minister.

"For, you see, he is some'rs in France," concluded the fisherman.

The magistrate laughed, and the earl turned and inquired:

"But what special business brought you here this morning, Abbott?"

"It were this red woolen scarf, what belonged to Ham Gow, your honor, and what I found to-day while I was overhauling the cabin of my craft. He wore it on board the vessel, and he must have forgotten and left it there when he went on shore."

"Ah! Gow's scarf!—Yes!—This is corroborative evidence, if it can be identified as Gow's," said Mr. Ball, as he took the scarf from the hands of the fisherman.

"His name be knit into it, if you will look, sir. Young Nan be very clever at knitting names and 'nitials into things," explained the fisherman.

"Ay, here it is, sure enough; knit into the pattern," said the magistrate, examining the scarf.

"And he had it on when he came on board, sir. And he must have left it when he went on shore, because I found it when I were overhauling the craft."

"Very well; we will keep this scarf, in case it should be wanted. It certainly supports your evidence, Abbott."

"I am willing to stake a ten-pound note against a shilling that Gow never crossed the channel in your craft, Abbott, and never sailed for Australia, in your sight, Mr. Traverse!" said Dr. Ellis.

But as neither the Church of England clergyman nor the Wesleyan fisherman were betting men, the doctor's stake was not covered.

The fisherman now bowed himself out, and his humble example was soon followed by the minister and the doctor.

"And now, my lord," said the magistrate, as soon as he was left alone with the earl, "is not this the most curious case you ever heard of? Here are, to begin with, three contradictory theories of the murder: first, that it was perpetrated by Ham Gow, the tramp, who was known to have been alone with the late earl, in his chamber, long after the household had retired, and this theory is supported by the evidence of certain witnesses who overheard the accused man using very suspicious language in regard to the appointed meeting, and almost confirmed by the flight of the tramp."

"Yes," assented his lordship, in a low tone.

"And the second theory is that the valet alone committed the murder. And this theory is supported by the evidence of the Hall footman, who overheard the valet using threatening language concerning his master, and by that of Dr. Laude, who saw Delaplaine enter the late earl's chamber at an early hour of the morning; and this theory also seems to be confirmed by the flight of the valet."

"Yes," again assented the new earl, very faintly.

"And the third theory is that the deed was done by a stranger, who managed to enter the house during the progress of the ball, and to conceal himself in the chamber of the late Lord Hawkewood. And this theory is strongly upheld by the testimony of Lady Volante Belle Isle, who saw the valet and the tramp leave the chamber together, and heard the earl's voice from within directing Delaplaine by what way to conduct Gow from the premises. This was at an hour subsequent to that in which the tramp was received in the bedroom, and also subsequent to that in which the valet was seen by Dr. Laude to enter it."

"Yes," breathed the earl faintly.

"But Lady Volante's testimony does not end here. She saw this transaction at the door of his lordship's chamber when she was on her way downstairs to look for a lost jewel. Nearly two hours later, having found her jewel, she was returning from her search, when she—she passed in sight of his lordship's door and saw a man emerge from the room."

At this moment a deadly paleness overspread the face of the new earl, his head sank to the back of his chair, and his hands clutched the arms.

"You—you are ill, my lord! Let me get you something!" exclaimed Mr. Ball, in alarm, as he sprang up and walked over to the beaufet.

"No—no—it is nothing—a spasm of the heart, to which I am subject. There, it is over. Go on," said the earl, striving, and not without success, to recover his calmness.

"A man in a dark dressing-gown and a black velvet cap with a gold tassel, a man with a pale, scared face and startled eyes, who first glanced cautiously up and down the corridor, and then—without seeing Lady Volante, who had shrunk into the shadows of a narrow passage—cautiously closed the door and stole away."

"Did—she—recognize this man?" falteringly inquired the new Lord Hawkewood.

"Why, no. Of course not!"

"And—has—she—no suspicion of his identity, then?"

"No. None whatever. My lord, this subject agitates you."

"No. It is only my heart. Go on with what you were about to say."

"I was only about to beg you take notice of the singular coincidences that there are three distinct and contradictory theories of the murder, and also three distinct and contradictory identifications of the alleged murderer, Ham Gow. These circumstances, taken in connection with the theft of the body on the night of the inquest, make the crime among the most remarkable on record."

"They do, indeed," assented the new earl, in a more cheerful tone of voice, for his spirits seemed to be rallying.

"And now, my lord, I am going over to police headquarters to see to the sending of officers on these new routes

indicated in the statements of the doctor and the parson," said Mr. Ball, as he arose and shook hands with the new earl.

After the departure of the magistrate the young Lord Hawkewood arose from his chair and began to walk slowly up and down the library floor, muttering to himself:

"Can she suspect? Can she? But no—it is impossible!

"I have not seen her since that morning of—the—murder, when I met her in the breakfast room. Her face indicated no knowledge of the event then, no suspicion, no disturbance of any sort.

"She greeted me with a smile.

"But when, a few minutes later, the discovery was made, then indeed she was more deeply affected by the news than anyone present—more deeply affected than the event, horrible as it really was, should have caused her to be—unless upon the theory that she was in love with Horace, as the Hall gossips whisper her to have been.

"Well, she comes down to lunch to-day for the first time since—since—the morning on which the murder was discovered.

"I shall meet her at the table and shall see at a glance whether she suspects the identity of the man she saw steal out of the dead earl's chamber at six o'clock in the morning.

"Who would have thought that there was anybody about in the bachelors' corridor at that hour? Perdition! What possessed a young woman to be prowling about the house in the darkness before daylight? A lost jewel, indeed! A fig's end!

"However," he concluded, as he resumed his seat at the table and leaned his elbow on its top, and bowed his head in his hand, "I shall see her in a few minutes, and be able to judge how much she knows or suspects.

"To-morrow morning her party will leave the Hall. If I find out to-day that my lady fair has no troublesome suspicions, then I shall give the duke a hint of my intentions and hopes, and so, in a few weeks, I may be able to make my Lady Volante Belle Isle the Countess of Hawkewood—and—cure her of sleepwalking."

With this pious asperation the young earl left the library and went up to his chamber to change his dressing-gown

for a coat, and in other ways improve his toilet, to join his guests at the luncheon board.

Yes, the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors and the Lady Volante Belle Isle were to leave Hawkewood Hall the next morning.

Since the disclosure made by the young lady to the magistrate, of the strange scenes witnessed by her in the bachelors' corridor, before daybreak on the morning of the murder, she had seemed like one whose mind was relieved of a heavy burden.

Her spirits rallied and her health and strength returned.

The time for her departure to Castle Belle Isle was fixed.

To-day she was to essay her strength by coming down to lunch with the family.

After breakfast to-morrow she would depart with her parents for their home.

While Lord Hawkewood was dressing in his own room, Lady Volante Belle Isle was puting the last touches to her own toilet in her boudoir. She wore black in honor of the Hall's mourning for its late lord.

Her dress on this occasion was a lusterless black silk, lightly trimmed with black crape, and finished with narrow white *crêpe lisse* ruches around her throat and wrists. Her ornaments were jet earrings, brooch, necklace, and bracelets. Her raven black hair was dressed high on the crown of her head in puffs and braids, and a fringe of silky curls on the edge of her forehead. A single white rose on the side of her head set off the darkness of her tresses.

Having completed her simple toilet, she sat down to wait for her mother.

When the duchess joined her they walked down together to the small breakfast parlor, where the dainty luncheon was laid.

Here they were soon joined by the duke, who came in from a stroll in the park, and by the late tutor, who was still a guest in the house, and lastly by their host, the new Lord Hawkewood, who bowed to his assembled party, and then went up to Lady Volante Belle Isle, took her hand and very warmly congratulated her on her convalescence and expressed his joy at seeing her among them again.

But how anxiously he scanned her face in the meantime!

His anxiety was almost instantly relieved, for she looked up at him, met his eyes frankly, and smiled as she replied, thanking him for his courtesy.

He would gladly have given her his arm to the table, but that attention was so manifestly due to the duchess, her mother, that he could not make such a breach of etiquette.

He bowed and offered his escort to her grace, while the venerable Dr. Laude performed the same office for the young lady, leaving the Duke of Grand Manors to amble on alone.

The young earl took the head of his own table, with the duchess on his right hand and the beauty on his left. Next to the duchess sat Dr. Laude, and next to the young lady sat the duke.

As their host, Lord Hawkewood divided his attention very equally between the two ladies, but his eyes dwelt most frequently upon the beautiful face of Lady Volante.

Soon after luncheon the young lady retired to her room, and did not leave it again that day.

No allusion had been made to the morning of the tragedy. It was thought best not to touch upon the agitating subject in her presence, for, though convalescent, she was not yet restored to full health and strength; but the earl had observed enough to convince him that the young lady had no suspicion of the identity of the man she had last seen stealing from the room of the murdered lord in the darkness before daybreak of that fatal morning.

This emboldened him to say to the Duke of Grand Manors, as they sat over their wine after dinner that evening, that he earnestly desired to do himself the honor of waiting on his grace at an early date at Castle Belle Isle, upon a subject very near his—the earl's—heart.

The duke replied that he would be always happy to receive Lord Hawkewood at his house.

About noon the next day the ducal party left Hawke Hall—the duke, the duchess, and their daughter riding in one carriage.

Lady Volante Belle Isle seemed depressed. Her spirits, in fact, were still very fluctuating.

One day she would be cheerful, another gloomy.

This was one of her sad days.

"We must get Berry Irvine to the castle for a few days. She will cheer Volante," said the duchess, as they drove slowly along the great avenue of oaks leading from the Hall to the high road.

"Yes, and let her bring Isoline. It is strange how that poor girl is kept in seclusion at Stony Fells! She must be twenty years old, and has never been brought out. It looks as if the beautiful mother were jealous of her own daughter," said the duke.

"I notice that Berry is less fond of her than formerly," admitted the duchess.

Volante said nothing.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRANGE LADY AT STONY FELLS

By a shore where beetling cliffs
Overhang the breaking spray,
While the pure white sand beneath
Border fair a rockbound bay.—ALFORD.

MENTION has been made, in this story, of Stony Fells, an old manor occupying a position on the coast almost as wild, savage, and terrific as that of the Demondike itself.

It was a portion of the vast estate of Hawkewood, though it was situated about five miles up the coast from Demondike and about eight from Hawke Hall.

The house was an edifice of immense strength, built of stone upon the extreme point of a rocky promontory overhanging the sea.

It was a much more ancient building than Hawke Hall, and had been the residence of the Hawkewood family for centuries before the Hall was erected.

The ground around it is rocky and nearly barren, yielding only a coarse grass and a few hardly evergreen and other stunted trees.

The chief value of the estate in the olden time had been

its fisheries; but even these had declined in the latter years through some changes in the coast.

The old house had remained uninhabited for many years, for, in fact, it was by no means "a desirable family residence"—to use the words of the agents.

But a few years before the opening of this story it had been leased at a very low rate by a widow lady of aristocratic aspirations and slender means.

This tenant might undoubtedly have made herself more comfortable with the same money in some pretty modern villa or cottage ornée, of which there were seven to be let in the beautiful neighborhood of Hawkeville; but she seemed to prefer the prestige of living in an ancient manor house, once the family seat of a long line of nobles, even although it was bare, bleak, uncomfortable, and, from its remoteness, solitude, and isolation, dangerous as a residence.

Her only introduction to the neighborhood was a church letter which she had brought from the Rev. Joseph Jephson, the pastor of the Yorkshire parish from which she came, to the Rev. James Vincent, rector of Hawkeville.

This letter described her as Mrs. Bernes Irvine, the widow of the late Arthur Irvine, of his parish; commended her to the care of the rector, and invoked his good offices for her and for her young daughter, her only child, Isoline, or Isola.

The rector of Hawkeville promptly honored the draught made upon his courtesy and humanity.

On the day after the receipt of this letter, which the widow had sent to him through the mail, he rode up to Stony Fells and called upon the stranger.

He was introduced into a large, lofty apartment, which had evidently once been the great hall of the manor house, where the walls were hung with ancient tapestry, and decorated with rusty armor and crumbling stags' antlers, and where the floor was covered by a modern carpet, all at variance with the old oaken tables and chairs that completed the furniture.

But the sight of the lady who advanced to receive him soon put all these incongruities out of his head.

She was a tall, slender woman, looking to be about

twenty years of age, though she was really twenty-eight. She had a regular and rather severe profile, with moderately high forehead, small, aquiline nose, short, curled upper lip, plump under lip, and rounded chin—a beautiful, resolute face, lighted by a pair of burning black eyes, tempered by long, thick, black eyelashes, and topped by gently curved, jet-black eyebrows; the whole shaded by rippling black hair, plainly parted over her forehead, brought down over her temples and ears, and rolled back in a loose, ripply mass at the back of her head.

She was dressed in deep mourning, without a scrap of white to relieve it.

She advanced toward the rector with a smiling face, and offered her hand, saying, with a voice whose melody lingered long in the memory of the minister:

"How good you are to me, to come so soon. This is rather a dilapidated old place in which to welcome you, however."

"It might be improved—really it might be," admitted the rector, as he took her offered hand and pressed it cordially, adding, as they both seated themselves on a hard, high-backed oak settle, "I must call the attention of the Hawkewood steward to the condition of this place. It is highly reprehensible for him to have let it to a lady in this state!"

"Ah, but you see I get it at an almost merely nominal rent!" replied Mrs. Irvine. And she named the low price she paid.

"You could get a very comfortable little villa, or cottage ornée, for the same money," observed the rector.

"Ah, but neither the villa nor the cottage in question would be an ancient building, with eight centuries of history and tradition behind it."

"Oh! If you have the mediæval mania, my dear lady, I have nothing more to say, only that I will see to it the place be made habitable and wholesome for you," said the rector.

And his attention was immediately drawn away from the subject by the entrance of a beautiful child of about ten years of age, bearing a close resemblance to her mother, and, like her, dressed in deep mourning.

"Come here, Isola, and welcome our rector. She is my only one, Mr. Vincent," said the widow, taking the hand of her little daughter and presenting her to the visitor.

The child lifted her lovely dark eyes to the face of the minister and shyly offered her hand. A charming little miniature image of the beautiful mother she was, with her fine, severely regular and resolute features softened and shaded by the large, tender, heavily-fringed dark eyes and the fine, silky, rippling black hair.

"She is not at school, this little lady?" the rector said, by way of saying something.

"She is not at school; she has never been at school. I am her only teacher. She has never been away from me," replied the lady, with a fond look at her child.

When the rector arose to take leave he said:

"Some of my parishioners will call to see you, in the course of the week."

"Oh, no, pray," said the widow, with a deprecating smile; "let them come next week, when I shall have some sort of a place fitted up for their reception. I have had to welcome you in the hall, for want of parlor or drawing-room. Yet, indeed, I am very glad to see you, even in this rude old place; for already, since your visit, I feel more at home—less like a stranger," she added, as she gave him her hand.

In the course of the following week several of the county families called on the widow at Stony Fells.

Among others came the Duchess of Grand Manors, who gave the beautiful stranger a cordial invitation to Castle Belle Isle.

This was the commencement of an acquaintance that soon ripened into intimacy, so that in course of time Mrs. Berners Irvine grew to be affectionately spoken of by the ladies of the castle, as "Berry Irvine," or even "Bonny Berry Irvine," and she and her little daughter, Isoline, Isola, or Isa, as she was indiscriminately called, became frequent and welcome visitors to the ducal family, whenever the latter were staying at Belle Isle.

At such seasons the castle would be filled with guests, for the duke and duchess were noted for their elegant and lavish hospitality, and then the wondrous beauty of the young widow would be the subject of general admiration.

But for two circumstances she might have brought some of her admirers to her feet and have made a brilliant marriage.

The first was that she was known to be a poor widow incumbered with a daughter. The second was that she was utterly reticent on the subject of her past life.

The widow of a curate, commended by a church letter from a clergyman in Yorkshire to a clergyman in Cornwall. That vouched for her good reputation as a woman, and for nothing else.

The curate's widow might have been the daughter of a duchess, or of a dairy maid, for aught anyone knew.

"For," as one of her most ardent yet most prudent admirers had observed, "the curates seem to have the utmost latitude in marriage. They may run away with a young lady, or they may marry her maid. And it proves nothing to say that this lovely widow is refined; for it happens sometimes that the lady's maid is quite as ladylike as her lady. And on the other side it is very strange that Mrs. Irvine has never alluded to her parentage."

No, never had the slightest slip of the tongue, in her most confiding moods, conveyed the smallest hint in regard to her past life to the ears of her most intimate friend!

As the lovely widow had come into the neighborhood bearing a church letter from the Yorkshire minister to the Cornwall rector, that letter had given her a certain status in the parish. She had, since her arrival, been a regular attendant upon the church services and an active laborer in its charities.

She had little or no money to spare, but she had given her time and labor freely.

One preëminent and highly cultivated talent she possessed. She was beyond all question by far the most gifted and accomplished musician in the county, and a most skillful teacher of her beautiful art.

Her voice was a rich, superb, double contralto. She was ever ready either to play the organ or to sing in the church choir, or teach the parish school children—all gratuitously, for love of the work.

Her little daughter Isoline inherited her musical talent as

well as her wondrous beauty, and it was the mother's most agreeable occupation to cultivate the gift of her child.

These works were good and won "golden opinions from all sorts of men" for the beautiful stranger.

But there are gossips, carpers, and detractors all over the world, and Hawkeville had a large share.

These latter asked inconvenient questions of the rector, the steward, and each other concerning the charming widow.

"Why should Mrs. Berners Irvine, with a young daughter to educate, and a small, independent income that would enable her to live anywhere, choose this out-of-the-way place, far from all her friends—if she has any—Mr. Vincent?" inquired Mrs. Ball, one day, when the rector was making a pastoral call at Bowling Green.

"I suppose the place took her fancy, madam, and having an income, and so being free to choose, she chose it," replied the rector.

"Humph!—very odd!" commented the lady. And the subject dropped for the time being.

"Why does she never allude to her family, or her past life? Surely, if all was right, she would speak of them sometimes," inquired Mrs. Traverse, the steward's wife, of Dr. Laude, who had called on business.

"Don't know, I'm sure, mum! All we care to know about the lady is that she brought a church letter to us! She certainly leads a very blameless and beneficent life here," replied the doctor.

"Oh, ay! I dare say! Full of good works and the like! But don't you see, doctor, that she does her good works only to get into good company and make a good marriage for herself!"

"No, mum, I don't see anything of the sort. The Duchess of Grand Manors is her friend."

"Oh, the Duchess of Grand Manors loves to patronize people! She would rather associate with people she can look down on and patronize, than with the royal family themselves!" said Mrs. Traverse.

Dr. Laude then smiled grimly. He knew that the steward's wife, with her plain, hard, common sense, had hit upon the exact truth.

"Do you think she'll marry again, doctor?" inquired Mrs. Traverse.

"Who, mum?"

"Oh, you know. The pretty widow!"

"I cannot say, mum! I am not interested in the question," gruffly replied Dr. Laude.

"Well, all I know about it, she is trying hard enough to do it!" said Mrs. Traverse, just as the entrance of her husband put an end to the conversation.

And the steward, after bowing to the doctor, led the way to his little office, where they retired to transact business.

Again the steward's wife had hit upon the truth. Berry Irvine was trying to catch a husband. Her best friends could not deny it.

The duchess defended her.

"How can you blame her, poor soul! She has evidently seen better days and she is now suffering all the evils of 'genteel poverty.' She wants to improve her condition for her daughter's sake, as well as her own, no doubt. And what does she do? Nothing unladylike. She dresses herself with the greatest taste, and sets off her beauty to the best advantage, and she makes herself as attractive as possible to all eligible gentlemen. And why should you criticise her for that? She does no more than every marriageable young lady in society does."

Pretty Berry Irvine could not have had a more earnest and powerful advocate than she possessed in her grace the Duchess of Grand Manors.

But a few months after the settlement of the widow at Stony Fells, an event occurred which stimulated the gossip, which had been dying out under the damping and depressing influence of the duchess' treatment, itno new life and vitality. Mrs. Berners Irvine went on a journey!

The movement in itself would not have been so strange, but that it was attended by all the secrecy, mystery or eccentricity that had characterized the first arrival of that strange lady.

Without having spoken of her intention to anyone, without having bidden good-by to anyone, she went away alone one Monday morning in December, leaving her little daughter Isola at Stony Fells in the care of the cook, Mrs.

Pond, and the housemaid, Leonora or Lona Pond, and she stayed away during the whole of the Christmas holidays, and returned about the middle of January.

The only explanation of her long and strange absence from home at such a time was given to the rector of Hawkeville and to the Duchess of Grand Manors, and amounted to no more than this—that she had been called away on important business, which had detained her for a month.

The Duchess of Grand Manors was an obstinate woman; having made up her mind to patronize Bonny Berry Irvine, she was determined to do it, come what might. So she put down all invidious speculation regarding the mysterious journey of the young widow by saying that it was no business of anyone except the lady in question.

But when three months later, at Easter, the widow again left home suddenly, and stayed until the holidays were over, and on coming home could give no other account of her absence than the vague explanation that she had been away on business, even the faith of her two best friends, the duchess and the rector, was slightly disturbed, and they would have liked to ask her on what business, precisely, she had gone; only it is not considered polite to press disagreeable questions.

But the year's wonders were not yet over.

When the long midsummer holidays were at hand, Mrs. Irvine suddenly left home again and remained away longer than at any former period, and did not return until the second week in September. Nor did she vouchsafe any further elucidation of her strange absence than she had offered on the two former occasions. She repeated that she had been called away on important business that had detained her, this time longer than usual, she added.

The faith of the duchess and the rector was severely shaken.

Had not the Balls and other people savagely criticised the conduct of the beautiful widow, the duchess might have forsaken her, but these malignant criticisms provoked the wrathful antagonism of her grace, who thereupon resolved to be true to her protégée, "through evil report as well as through good report," as she expressed herself—to "stick

to the woman through thick and thin," as Mrs. Traverse, the steward's wife, put it.

These mysterious journeys of the widow formed the subject of gossip around many an humble as well as aristocratic tea table, for Bonny Berry Irvine had a middle position between the high and the low; her social relations with the former and her benevolent labors among the latter rendered her equally familiar to both classes.

"Dunnot yer see," said Mrs. Carr, the parish clerk's wife, to a coterie of neighbors gathered around her tea table—"dunnot yer all see as it's summut to do wi' churches as takes her away? Dunnot yer mind as it is allus on a church holiday as Christmas and Easter as she goes? It is summut to do wi' churches, mind my word!"

"Oh, then, Missus Carr, dear, sure yer head is allus a-running on churches bekase ye're the clerk's wife! Midsummer ain't no church holiday! Yet the last time as ever was she went away of a midsummer! More like it is schools as she has summut to do with, for all her goings be on school holidays," said Mrs. Penn, the locksmith's better half.

"But the schools be all out on the holidays, so it can't be them," objected Mrs. Tree, the locksmith's old mother.

"That was true," they all agreed.

And then they left the question as they were always forced to leave it—unsettled.

But when year after year passed, and during every year the pretty widow went regularly on these mysterious journeys of which she would give no account, spending a month at Christmas—from the fifteenth of December until the fifteenth of January—and a week at Easter, and six weeks of midsummer of every year, the people's curiosity subsided into an apathetic amazement that did not even seek a solution of the question.

And all this time the widow's enemies whispered that she was trying vainly to "catch" some rich man for a husband.

Meanwhile the beautiful child Isoline was growing up into a most beautiful woman. And those same carping critics whispered that the lovely mother was jealous of the more lovely daughter.

It appeared that there was some truth in this. The widow, disappointed in her matrimonial aspirations, and seeing her daughter develop into such a perfection of womanhood, regarded her rather with the envy of a rival than with the pride of a mother.

"She will push me from my place," muttered the widow bitterly. "My own and only child will push me from my place."

And to put off that dreaded consequence as long as possible, the mother kept the daughter confined to her studies at dreary Stony Fells, until at the age of nineteen Isola had never been brought out into company.

The news of the tragedy at Hawke Hall had fallen on Stony Fells as it fell on other places, as with the shock of an earthquake. The lovely widow and her daughter were not intimate at the Hall. They had not been invited to the birthday fête; but the fate of the young earl did not affect them the less on that account; though the inmate most distressed by the intelligence of the calamity was certainly pretty Lona Pond, the daughter of the cook, and the housemaid at Stony Fells.

This girl had a surreptitious acquaintance with the handsome tramp, Ham Gow, whom she had first met at a village fair and to whom she was secretly engaged to be married.

The news that her betrothed was accused of the murder had filled her with horror and dismay, so that she went about the house in a dazed state of mind, almost incapable of doing her work, until one morning—the same morning on which Dr. Ellis had declared that he had met Gow in the path leading from Stony Fells—after which Lona's spirits rallied and she resumed her active duties with cheerfulness.

The next day came the invitation from the Duchess of Grand Manors to Mrs. Berners Irvine and Miss Irvine to spend a week at Castle Belle Isle.

Out of this event was to proceed a mystery even more bewildering to the people of Hawkeville than any which had preceded it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CAGED BEAUTY

Norham is grim and grated close,
Hemmed in with battlement and fosse.
And many a darksome tower,
And better loves my lady bright
To sit in liberty and light
In fair Queen Margaret's bower.
—Sir Walter Scott.

Thy only dream is liberty,
And restlessly, impatiently
Thou strugglest, strivest to be free.
—Longfellow.

On the morning after the departure of the ducal family from Hawke Hall, Mrs. Irvine and her daughter Isoline sat together in the antique, three-cornered, wainscoated parlor at Stony Fells.

In one corner was a fireplace, crosswise, in which burned a cheerful little fire of driftwood, which the coolness of the September morning on this bleak promontory, with the sea on both sides, rendered agreeable, if not necessary.

The fitting up of this unique, triangular room was simple enough.

The walls and ceiling were oak-paneled; the floor was bare, and highly polished; the furniture consisted of a corner cupboard filled with old china and battered plate; a corner clock as high as the cupboard; a round, oaken table before the fire, and several high-backed, oaken chairs.

Mrs. Irvine and her daughter Isoline sat at the table, engaged in fancy needlework, in which both were adepts.

As they sat there it would have seemed that the mother had no just cause to be jealous of the daughter's charms, for a more beautiful woman could scarcely have been found in the world than was Berry Irvine at this period of her life.

She was one of those lovely, luxurious brunettes whose beauty seems to be perennial, or immortal rather; and she

had led an exceptionally quiet life, free from all grief, hardship or excitement.

And now she was in the full maturity of her wondrous beauty—a luscious tea rose in its perfection.

But ah! Berry Irvine knew—none better knew—how swiftly full blooming is followed by fading—a shower or a breeze will scatter the petals of the full-blown flower; a grief or an illness will quickly change the mature beauty into an old woman.

Therefore was the mother jealous of the daughter—the blooming rose of the half-opened bud.

Berry's married life had been a short and happy one.

She had shed floods of tears over the loss of her husband, who had fallen a victim to a sharp attack of pneumonia; but in a few days her tears were dried and forgotten like April showers.

She had a sunny, affectionate, but rather shallow and fickle nature, and so, in a year or two after the loss of her husband, she wanted to marry again, and to marry a rich man.

She had been trying, vainly, to do so, from that time to this; and now that her blooming beauty was so soon to fade, she was more anxious than ever to accomplish her object.

Therefore also was she jealous of her young and lovely daughter, and kept her out of company.

If Isoline were seen abroad she might be admired, loved, wooed, and—wedded. And beautiful Berry might be converted into a mother-in-law—a grandmother.fl Oh! horror of horrors!

The daughter must be kept in the background until the mother should be well married.

As has been said, the daughter was wonderfully like the mother. Both had the same perfectly proportioned forms, of the same height; but the mother's was full and rounded, the daughter's slender and delicate; both had the same finely cut, firm, aquiline features, but the mother's face was full, the daughter's thin; both had the same luxurious raven-black hair, and large, tender, deep-fringed dark eyes, and the same creamy complexions and plump red lips, only

the mother's complexion was the richer in color and the daughter's the more dainty.

They were not wearing mourning now, of course; the elder lady wore a black silk dress with lace ruffles at the throat and wrists, and scarlet velvet bows on her bosom and in her black hair.

The younger one wore a plain dress of navy-blue cashmere with a white collar and cuffs—a dress that a schoolgirl might have worn.

Isoline worked slowly, languidly, and then dropped her hands upon her lap and sank into silent thought.

"What is the matter with you, Isa? You are so idle today! If you do not work more diligently those chair covers will not be finished by Christmas," said Berry Irvine, a little impatiently.

"And what if they are not finished, mamma? Of what use are they, anyhow? Of what use is life itself?" demanded the girl, in a discontented tone.

"Isa!" exclaimed the lady reprovingly.

"Well, yes, mamma! I repeat: Of what use is life? It is very dull and stupid and trifling, I think."

"I must get Mr. Vincent to talk to you, Isa."

"And what good would that do me, mamma? Has he the power to change my life?"

"Why are you so dissatisfied, Isoline?"

"I do not know; but I am tired of life—tired of everything. All is so dreary, so monotonous. I am sick of seeing the sun rise every morning in the east, and set every evening in the west. I am sick of the endless succession of day and night, and of summer and winter; and sickest of all I am of my own beating heart."

"You would prefer that the sun should never rise mornings, and summer never return; that it should be always night and always winter, and that your heart should cease to beat," said the lady reproachfully.

"I would prefer an earthquake or an inundation to this deadly monotony," exclaimed the young girl.

"You are very unreasonable, Isa."

"Am I, mamma? But what is my life? To rise every morning in the week, eat my breakfast, take my walk, and read until noon. Then take luncheon and embroider until

evening. Then take dinner and play music until bedtime. Then retire, with a feeling of relief that the day is done and life will be lost in sleep for a few unconscious hours. Then to wake up with a horrible despair in the consciousness of another day to be lived through. Such are the six week-days, and on Sundays to go to church to hear a dull parson preach a dull sermon to a dull congregation, who yawn, nod, or go to sleep. Such is my life, mamma. Do you wonder that I am weary of it, and that I often wish for death?" bitterly inquired the girl.

"Yet such a life—so calm, so peaceful, so regular—would be perfect bliss to some people," said the lady.

"I wonder what sort of people?" murmured the girl, with an incredulous smile.

"To those of quiet and contented spirits," replied the lady.

"But, unfortunately, I am not of such," murmured Isoline, with a sigh, which her mother echoed; for though she was jealous she loved the daughter, and appreciated this discontent.

"If you could only take me with you when you go visiting in the neighborhood, or when you go away on your periodical journeys, then, mamma, life might not seem so joyless to me."

"But that is impossible, Isoline. I cannot take you with me in my neighborhood visiting because you have never been invited to accompany me; nor can I make you the companion of my journeys, because I always go on business, which your presence would interrupt," replied the elder lady.

As she spoke the door opened, and the parlor maid, Lona, entered the room, bringing a little note on a small, battered, silver waiter.

"A groom from Castle Belle Isle brought it, madam; and he is waiting an answer," said the girl, as she approached her mistress.

The lady took the note and opened it, saying:

"It is from the Duchess of Grand Manors. She has returned with her party to the castle, it appears."

The note was as follows:

"CASTLE BELLE ISLE, Sept. 20, 18—.

"MINE BONNY BERRY: We returned here from 'grewsome' Hawke Hall this morning. Ah! what a visit was that! What an awful experience!

"To go to a birthnight ball, to dance all night, and to come into the breakfast room the next morning only to be tremendously shocked by the appalling news that the young earl whose anniversary we had been celebrating had been found dead—murdered in his bed!

"And as if that was not enough, to be held there as witnesses on the inquest and to be waked up the next morning with the monstrous intelligence that the dead body of the late earl had been stolen from the house during the night!

"Do you wonder that these terrible shocks have shaken us all stupendously?

"Volante was prostrated by them, so that she kept her bed for many days and her room for more than two weeks.

"The medical attendant would not consent to her removal until this morning.

"We have now brought her home; but she is in a very depressed condition.

"I write to ask you to come to us and bring your daughter.

"We are alone, so there cannot be the objection that you have so often urged against bringing Isoline to us—'A house full of gay company that would take the child's mind off her studies.'

"There is no one here but Cosmo, our nephew, and he is one of us.

"Bring Isoline and stay as long as you can.

"I am dying to give you a detailed account of the doings at Hawke Hall as seen by an eyewitness.

"Do you know that three several parties swear to having seen Ham Gow, the alleged assassin—each in a different place, at a time when he certainly could not have been in more than one of the places stated?

"The whole affair is strange beyond parallel. I am longing to talk it over with you.

"Write by my messenger whether you will come. If

so, I will send a carriage for you to-morrow, at any hour that you may fix.

"Give my love to *la belle* Isoline, and believe me your foolishly fond ELEANORA BELLE ISLE."

Mrs. Irvine read this note through and then looked up from its perusal thoughtfully.

Here was a present opportunity of gratifying her daughter's wish for a change of scene from dreary Stony Fells!

It was not the first invitation of the kind she had received for Isoline. She had been uncandid with the girl in saying that the reason why she had not taken her out visiting was because Isoline had not been invited. The reason was, as has been hinted, that she wished to keep her beautiful daughter in the background while the slightest hope of marriage remained for the handsome mother.

But now at this moment some natural affection and maternal sympathy inspired her with the wish to gratify the lonely recluse, and the occasion seemed a favorable one.

There was to be no company at Castle Belle Isle but Cosmo, whom Berry Irvine had never seen, but whom she judged—from having heard him talked of by the duchess and the young ladies—to be a naval cadet of fifteen or sixteen.

There was, then, no objection to taking her lovely daughter to Castle Belle Isle. Isoline would be almost as much retired there as at Stony Fells.

"What does the duchess say in her note, mamma?" inquired the girl, when the silence had lasted some minutes.

"She invites me to go on a few days' visit to Castle Belle Isle, and to bring you with me," said the lady.

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Isoline eagerly.

"Should you like to go?"

"Oh, very much, indeed!"

"Then that settles it. Bring my writing-desk here, Lona."

The parlor maid lifted the portable writing-desk from the little stand in the orner and placed it on the table before her mistress.

Mrs. Irvine opened it and wrote a note accepting the duchess' invitation for herself and her daughter, and nam-

ing the hour of noon the next day as the time when they would be ready to set out from Stony Fells to Castle Belle Isle.

She gave this note to Lona Pond to take down and deliver to the duchess' messenger.

"And now we must lay aside this embroidery and begin to make some preparation for our visit," said the lady, folding up her work.

"I am delighted to go, mamma!" exclaimed Isoline, with a radiant countenance.

"You poor girl; You have had but little variety in your life," said the lady, with a momentary feeling of compassion.

"Who is Cosmo, mamma?" inquired Isoline, as she put her embroidery away in one of the table drawers.

"Cosmo? Oh! a little midshipman on leave, I suppose. A nephew of the duke's. I have never seen him," replied the lady, as she led the way from the sitting-room, followed by her daughter.

The remainder of the afternoon and evening was spent by them in looking over their scanty wardrobe and selecting the best, to be handed over to Lona Pond, and brushed and pressed out and re-trimmed for their visit.

Early the next morning their trunks were packed, and they were ready and waiting for the carriage to take them to Belle Isle.

They had scarcely finished breakfast when it was announced.

They started on their journey, leaving the house in the care of Mrs. Pond and her daughter Lona, with directions to send their trunks on by the carrier's cart.

The ride from Stony Fells to Belle Isle led along the seaside until it neared the awful abyss of Demondike; there it turned up the brink of the dike to an ancient stone bridge that crossed the chasm.

They passed over this bridge, gazing with awe upon the roaring torrent below them, and then pursued their way along the seacoast toward their destination.

Isoline, who, as long as she had lived in the neighborhood, had never seen this horrid gorge before, turned pale as the carriage rolled over the ancient bridge.

"It has no fence, mamma! Nothing to keep man or beast who might make a misstep on a dark night from falling headlong into the abyss below! And, oh! with what rapidity such a victim would be whirled on in this roaring and thundering torrent to the ocean beyond!"

"Yes, it is dangerous; but people are used to it, I suppose," replied the lady, meditatively, as she turned her head and looked through the little back window of the coach upon the terrible scene they had just passed.

The remainder of their drive was grandly beautiful along the rock-bound coast.

CHAPTER XIV

CASTLE BELLE ISLE

This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses —SHAKESPEARE.

ABOUT halfway between the Demondike and Hawkeville hamlet the road divides—the left-hand fork going on along the top of the cliff toward the village and the right-hand fork sloping gradually to the beach below.

When the carriage containing Mrs. Irvine and her daughter reached this division Isoline made an involuntary exclamation of surprise and delight at the lovely vision that arose upon their view.

About half a mile from the shore lay the lovely rock-bound island of Belle Isle, with the white towers of its castle rising from its grove of emerald green trees, which on this southern coast had ont yet begun to turn in the early autumn air.

"What a charming place! It is like a vision of Paradise!" said Isoline warmly.

But the careful coachman now turned his horses' heads to the right and began to tighten his reins to descend the pass cut through the solid rocks that led to the beach below, and scarcely a breath was drawn in the carriage until they reached the sands in safety.

Here stood a substantial boathouse of stone, and here lay moored a ferryboat to take the carriage and horses, with their freight, to the island.

Four boatmen manned it. They were hardy-looking Cornishmen, in sailors' jackets and trousers, and with tarpaulin hats, which they took off in respect to the ladies in the carriage, which was slowly driven on the boat.

The boat was hoved off from the shore, and in a few moments landed at the steps of the isle, alongside of which stood another boathouse, surrounded by a small fleet of boats.

The ladies left the carriage and went up the steps, while the boat was pushed around to a more convenient place for driving the horses on shore.

At the head of the steps stood the Duchess of Grand Manors and several of her younger daughters—all in plain dresses of dark cashmere and garden hats of dark felt.

The duchess took Berry Irvine by the hand and kissed her, and then embraced Isoline and presented her to the young ladies, Victoria, Maude, and Beatrice Belle Isle, and then drew the arm of Berry through her own and led the way to the castle.

It was a lovely walk, through a grove of trees of so many varieties that the eye was charmed with contrasted shades of pale and dark-green and silver-gray, and no less charmed with contrasted shapes of trees and foliage, from the heavy form and shining dark leaves of the oak to the light and graceful figure and pale, feathery foliage of the acacia. Through this grove, to a terrace gay with flowers, thence along a marble walk bordered with shrubs, and up marble steps to higher terraces adorned with trees and shrubs, vases and statues, and finally to the grand entrance of the castle, which was approached first by marble steps leading from the highest terrace up to a marbled-pillared portico, and thence to the double doors of polished black walnut, inlaid with fine, hard woods of various descriptions.

These regal doors stood open and were attended by a solemn porter in black clothes and a white wig, and who looked like a bishop or a judge.

"I will take you where you can lay off your bonnets at

once, my dears," said the duchess, as she led the way for the guests through the portals into the regal hall, whose floor was a mosaic of the richest and rarest marble, whose wall were of oak, inlaid with fine, curious foreign woods, and whose lofty ceiling in the roof was illuminated by windows of stained glass illustrating the creation of light in that text of Genesis—"Let there be light, and there was light."

Richly carved doors all around this hall led into various reception, breakfast, and dining rooms, billiard, smoking, and steward's rooms, and finally into the justice's room, for the duke was lord lieutenant of the county.

A superb staircase arose from the center of this hall, and led from galleries above, with doors opening into saloons, drawing-rooms, parlors, boudoirs, and bedchambers.

Up this staircase the duchess led her guests, and on to a door of ebony and ivory, which a footman in waiting opened.

"This is your suite of rooms, my dears," said her grace, introducing her guests into an elegant boudoir, upholstered in ebony, ivory, and dark-blue satin and white lace, and opening into a bedchamber fitted up in the same style.

Berry Irvine sank into a sumptuous chair as if she had been accustomed to such luxuries all her life; but Isoline stood and gazed at the elegances around her in simple wonder and delight, hesitating to sit down and bring her woolen traveling-suit in contact with the glossy satin and delicate lace.

"I will leave you here, my dears. Greylock will wait on you. The lunch bell will ring in fifteen minutes," said her grace, with a smile, as she left the room.

The widow and her daughter passed on into the bedchamber, where a respectable-looking, middle-aged woman, in a gray woolen dress and a white apron and cap, stood waiting to attend to their wants.

Their trunks had not yet arrived, but the mother and daughter had brought handbags containing every necessary adjunct to convert their simple traveling-suits of black cashmere into morning dresses suitable to appear at a luncheon table. Collars and cuffs of fine embroidery, and

breast bows of rich ribbon, and fresh gloves were all they needed to effect the change.

When they were ready to go down, the hall footman led the way to the breakfast room below, where the lunch was laid.

Here they found the whole family assemblde—the duke and duchess, and all their sons and daughters.

Those who had not seen the guests on their arrival now came forward and shook hands with Mrs. Irvine and were presented to Miss Irvine, whom they each and all cordially welcomed to the castle.

Lady Volante, aged nineteen, was the eldest child. Next came the Marquis of Belle Isle, the heir, a lad of seventeen. Next to him Lord Cuthbert, a boy of fifteen. And following him in succession the three little ladies—Victoria, Maude, and Beatrice, dark-eyed lasses very much alike, and aged respectively thirteen, eleven, and nine.

Besides these there were three babies in the nursery—Eleanor, aged five; Alberta, three, and Charlotte, one year old.

In truth, there was no fear of failure in the ducal line of Grand Manors and Belle Isle.

The luncheon table was surrounded by a merry party.

"But, where is Cosmo?" inquired the duke. "A midshipman, accustomed to discipline on board, should be more punctual."

"You forget that Cosmo has been promoted," smiled the duchess.

"I beg the lieutenant's pardon! But his new dignity is so recent that it is apt to slip my memory."

At this moment a tall and elegant-looking young man, with a fine Grecian profile, fair complexion, light-gray eyes and flaxen hair and mustache, entered the room, and, seeing strangers, stopped and bowed.

"My nephew, Lieut. Belle Isle—Mrs. Berners Irvine—Miss Irvine," said the duke, rising and presenting the newcomer to his guests.

The young gentleman bowed again and smiled with pleasure as he took the vacant chair that happened to stand beside Isoline, and with a "modest assurance," all his own,

immediately began to make himself agreeable to that young lady.

Mrs. Berners Irvine bit her pretty lip until it was redder than ever before with vexation at this meeting.

The "boy middy" was in fact a very handsome naval officer, six feet tall. If she had known this she never would have brought Isoline to the castle.

Her fears immediately flew to final consequences. "If that handsome blond man and that beautiful brunette girl should fall in love with each other! And nothing is more likely," said the widow to herself, as she watched them and listened to the gay sallies of wit and humor that flashed from the young man's lips and eyes, and caused the depressed young girl to smile and even to laugh with delight!

It was too late now; she could not undo the present; but she resolved, if this acquaintance should seem likely to go on, that she would make some excuse to shorten her visit and return to Stony Fells, and—never be caught in such a trap again!

When the luncheon was over, the younger members of the ducal family returned to their schoolroom and the elders withdrew with their guests to the pretty drawing-room in daily use in the family.

Here, at the request of the duchess, the mother and daughter went to the piano to sing a duet from the opera of "Norma."

Miss Irvine played the accompaniment.

Lieut. Belle Isle stood behind the young lady, bending over her devotedly, under the plea of turning her music.

Both mother and daughter were such musical enthusiasts that neither, at the time, troubled her head to think of the devoted cavalier who stood in attendance upon them.

Their audience, too—the duke and duchess, the young Lord Belle Isle, and the Lady Volante—hung entranced upon the melody of their voices.

When the duet was over, Lieut. Belle Isle led Miss Irvine to the sofa and seated himself beside her.

The duchess took possession of Berry Irvine and carried her off to the *tête-à-tête* seat.

"You witch, Berry! Do you tell me that you were your daughter's sole teacher?" inquired her grace.

"Certainly," replied the widow.

"And she never had any other instructor than yourself?"

"Never! How could she have had? You have known us ever since we first came here, when she was a little child, and where in this neighborhood could I have obtained a music teacher for her?" inquired the widow.

"Where, indeed?" laughed the duchess. "Yet she is such a very accomplished pianist and singer that I thought she must have had other instruction than yours."

"But why should she not have gained all her perfection in the art from me?"

"Because, my dear—I do not mind telling you, for you are her mother, and mothers are never jealous of their daughters—because, then, excellent as you yourself may be as a singer and a pianist, your beautiful daughter excels you in both accomplishments! Ah! what would I not give to secure a music mistress with half the skill and talent of yourself and your daughter for my little girls," sighed the duchess.

"Have they no music teacher, then?" inquired Berry Irvine.

"Oh, there is Mademoiselle Millevoye, their governess, who is a fair specimen; but she is not a gifted artiste, my love, such as I would like to have for my little girls," said the duchess, with another sigh.

Berry Irvine understood the drift of all this conversation. She knew the duchess wished and hinted what delicacy prevented her from proposing in so many words—that Isoline Irvine should become the music teacher of the young ladies Belle Isle.

And Berry knew that the salary the duchess would be willing to offer would be about three times the amount of her own slender income. But Berry Irvine would have seen her friend the duchess sunk into the bottom of the sea before she would have taken the hint and offered the services of her daughter as the salaried teacher of the Duchess of Grand Manors' young ladies.

While this conversation was going on, Isoline, at the solicitation of the duke, arose to sing and play a solo from the new opera of "The Niebelungenlied."

Cosmo Belle Isle led her to the piano, adjusted her stool,

and opened her music book; then bent over her and turned the pages as she sang.

Mrs. Irvine fidgeted and bit her lip, and confirmed herself in the resolution to cut her visit short.

When the solo was over the duke warmly thanked the young singer, and Lieut. Cosmo Belle Isle led her back to her sofa, and devoted himself to her for the rest of the afternoon.

Lady Volante lay reclining in her easy-chair, taking no part in the conversation. The young Lord Belle Isle sat on a hassock at her feet trying to amuse her with bright anecdotes of the boat racing at his college, but failing to interest her in the least degree.

When the first dinner bell rang the party separated to dress.

The widow and her daughter went up to their rooms, where they found their trunks waiting for them.

Isoline, acting as her mother's maid, unlocked the lady's trunk, and began to lay out her dresses.

"I shall wear the black damasée silk, and the duchess lace set, with the pearl jewelry," said the widow.

Her daughter obediently laid the dress and decorations out on the bed, and then proceeded to unpack and hang up in the *armoires* her mother's other dresses.

"You had better leave them and get yourself ready for dinner. We have not too much time. We can let Greylock put them away, and here she is now," said the widow, as the woman made her appearance to offer her services.

"Come and help me to dress," said Mrs. Irvine.

Mrs. Greylock obeyed, leaving Isoline to unpack her own trunk and dress herself.

Isoline wore a white figured organdy muslin, with pale pink ribbons, and no jewelry. It was her mother's whim still to dress her as a young schoolgirl.

They went down to the drawing-room, where they found the party augmented by the arrival of the Rev. Mr. Vincent.

The rector advanced to greet Mrs. and Miss Irvine in the most cordial manner.

The dinner was announced, and the rector gave his arm to the duchess, the duke conducted Mrs. Irvine, Cosmo Miss Irvine, and Lord Belle Isle Lady Volante.

And so they went to dinner.

After that festive meal was over the party spent the evening quietly in the drawing-room.

The duke, the duchess, the rector, and Mrs. Irvine formed a rubber of whist—the duke and the widow playing together against the duchess and the rector.

Cosmo Belle Isle devoted himself to the beautiful Isoline Irvine, and Lord Belle Isle to his sister, Lady Volante.

An unusually strong and tender tie bound this brother and sister together.

But from the whist table Berry Irvine watched the couple on the *tête-à-tête* sofa—Cosmo and Isoline—and watching them, played worse than she had ever done in her life, returning her adversary's lead, trumping her partner's tricks, and committing other higher crimes and misdemeanors against the laws of Hoyle, and so provoking the duke that he heartily wished for the privilege of committing her for such offenses.

If the duke was provoked, however, the duchess was pleased, for she and her partner won the rubber, much to the discomfiture of their antagonists—the duke and the widow.

The rector arose and bade his friends good-night and left.

Soon after his departure the circle broke up and retired.

"Isoline," said the widow, when she found herself alone with her daughter in the bedchamber, "Isoline, I am quite ashamed of you!"

"Mamma! what have I done?" cried the startled girl, blushing with astonishment and mortification.

"What, indeed! I wonder what Lieut. Cosmo Belle Isle thinks of you!" exclaimed the lady.

"Oh, mamma, what have I done?" cried the amazed and abashed girl, beginning to tremble, while the blush deepened and darkened on her cheek.

"You have been too forward; too familiar—much, very much too forward and familiar in your manners to that young gentleman."

"Oh! mamma, have I really! I did not mean to be so! I did not know! I spoke and acted as I felt. Oh, I am so sorry! I feel so humiliated!" said the unsophisticated

girl, believing every word her mother said and bursting into tears of grief and self-abasement.

"I think I shall take you home to-morrow, and keep you there until you learn how to behave yourself in company," said the widow, as she proceeded to undress.

Nothing more was said between the mother and daughter.

Isoline prepared for bed, and they were soon lying side by side; but the widow quickly dropped into a deep and healthful sleep, while the poor girl was kept awake by the humiliating thought that she had been too forward and familiar in her manner to Cosmo Belle Isle, and that he must despise her for having been so, and by the oft-repeated resolution that she would be sufficiently reserved with all persons for the future.

Mrs. Berners Irvine had said that she would take her daughter back to Stony Falls the next day.

But the next morning brought with it news that sent all jealous thoughts concerning Isoline and her admirer out of the widow's head.

It was after breakfast, and the gentlemen had gone on the main for a day's shooting over the Hawkewood preserves.

The ladies were all assembled in the boudoir of the duchess.

Berry Irvine and her daughter were engaged on their everlasting embroidery.

Lady Volante was busy with her flower painting in water colors—an art in which she was an adept.

The duchess was looking over the morning papers.

Presently her grace glanced up from her *Times* and exclaimed:

"Why, Volante, who do you think is gone?"

"'Gone,' mamma?" repeated the young lady indifferently, as she laid down one camel's-hair pencil to select a finer one.

"Dead, I mean, of course. Who do you think is dead?" said the duchess.

"I am sure I do not know, mamma. No one that we are interested in, however, or you would not use that tone. Who is it?" listlessly inquired Volante, as she went on painting, in fine strokes, the shading of a moss rose.

"The Princess Maria Zavieski!" answered the duchess, laying down the paper and looking at her daughter.

It is well that she looked in that direction. If she had glanced toward Berry Irvine she would have seen that the beautiful widow had turned pale as marble and was staring with fixed, stony eyes on the speaker, forgetful that other eyes might question her mood.

"Well, mamma, dear, what is there so surprising in that? She was very aged, was she not?"

"She was ninety-five, the notice says."

"Then the only wonder is that she should have lived so long," said Lady Volante.

"A lonely and supremely selfish woman like the Princess Zavieski, who cares for nothing and for nobody but herself, would be likely to live long. Indeed, I was surprised to see the notice of her death, for she seemed to be a permanent institution in Belgravia—one of those persons who seem to have gotten into a confirmed habit of living."

"She belongs to history, does she not?" inquired Lady Volante.

"Well, yes, rather," replied the duchess, with a smile. Then turning to her guests, she said:

"We are speaking of a very remarkable woman, who is just dead, my dear. You must have heard of her—the Princess Maria Zavieski."

"I—yes—I—think so," replied Berry Irvine, in a low, tremulous voice, as she shifted her position so as to get her back to the window and her face in the deep shadow as she bent over her embroidery.

Had not the duchess been so preoccupied with her subject she must have noticed the intense agitation of her guest.

"A very remarkable woman, this Princess Zavieski, with a very remarkable history. Perhaps, if you are not familiar with it, you would like to hear it," pursued her grace, without very attentively regarding her guest.

"Yes," faintly responded the pallid widow.

"Well, her maiden name was Mary Smith—about the commonest name you could find in the London directory, don't you think so?"

"Yes," responded the widow in a low voice, as she bent over her embroidery. She did not know what she was

doing, for she was finishing off a fair lily with scarlet floss instead of fine white silk.

"And you would wonder how Mary Smith came to be converted into the Princess Maria Zavieski."

"Yes," breathed the widow, still bending low over her work, while Isoline dropped hers upon her lap and gave her whole attention to the duchess, feeling as eager as a child for a story.

"Yet, though her name was a very common one, she did not belong to a very common family, I assure you. There are Smiths in the landed gentry, and even in the nobility of Great Britain."

"I remember hearing that the Princess Maria Zavieski's father, Ferdinand Smith, was a near relative of the Smiths, Barons of Carrington, and also to Sir John James Smith of——" began Lady Volante, but her mother cut her short.

"Of no matter where, Volante! Don't interrupt me. Her father, the Rev. Ferdinand Smith, was a clergyman of the Church of England, with a very large family and a very small income—things that should be incompatible, but, unfortunately, are not so, for they go together in most ministers' lives. Well, Mary was the eldest daughter, and she was educated for a governess, and her very first engagement was as English teacher in the Russian minister's family."

"That of the Count——"

"Yes, Volante! Don't interrupt! She was treated there more like a daughter than a dependent. They took her to St. Petersburg with them, and often had her to play and sing in their drawing-rooms, as well for their large companies as for themselves, for Mary Smith had so fine a voice that it was said of her that but for her father's holy office she would have gone on the operatic stage and won both fame and fortune."

"It might have been better if she had," observed Lady Volante.

"Perhaps; but it was not her destiny. Her desting was —to be seen at the receptions of the count by the young Prince Paul Zavieski, a near relative of the reigning family."

"Some say he was an unacknowledged son of the czar," muttered Lady Volante.

"At any rate, he fell violently in love with the beautiful singer, Mary Smith, and not being free to wed openly, he persuaded the ambitious girl to elope with him to Germany, where they were married and where they might have lived happily if they had had anything to live on. But as they had not, why, just as soon as their pocket money was expended, they ventured back to Russia, where all the prince's possessions lay."

"A dangerous venture," put in Volante.

"Yes, for as soon as they crossed the line they were both arrested and thrown into prison. Nothing, I think, but the great influence of the count, the former patron of Mary Smith, saved the young couple from the knout and Siberia."

"What savage laws!" broke in Lady Volante.

"The affair was finally compromised in this way: The young husband consented to divorce his beautiful wife, whether she consented or not, on condition that the czar would settle on her a sufficiently large fortune to enable her to live in opulence. This the czar consented to do on the further condition that the lady would leave the Russian dominions, never to return. She consented to this arrangement and came to England and to London, bought a handsome house in Belgravia, which she christened Zavieski Palace, and lived there in splendor as the Princess Zavieski. Whether she had any right to retain the title after her divorce, I cannot tell you. She had led a very eccentric life, and I was told has made a very eccentric will—leaving her whole property to her only surviving relative, one Mary Smith, her great-grandniece, a maiden lady residing in Germany, on condition that she, Mary Smith, should not marry during the princess' lifetime. As the old lady lived to be ninety-five, the conditions were rather hard on her heiress, who must now be about forty years of age——"

The duchess was interrupted by a sudden movement of Lady Volante and Isola Irvine, who both simultaneously sprang toward the window.

"What is the matter?" demanded her grace, rising.

"Mrs. Irvine has fainted," replied Lady Volante.

CHAPTER XV

BERRY IRVINE'S DANGER

I have cast my life upon a die,
And will abide the issue of the cast.
—SHAKESPEARE.

Oh, unexpected stroke, worse than of death!
Must I then leave thee? —MILTON.

ISOLINE IRVINE hastened to her mother's side, raised the drooping head that had fallen on the left arm of the easy-chair, and began with hasty and tremulous fingers to loosen the front of the dress, crying all the time in low and frightened tones:

"Mamma! Mamma! Oh! what is the matter? Oh; my dear duchess, is she—is she——"

"She has fainted, my dear girl. Do not be alarmed. The heat of the room, perhaps. Volante, my love, throw up the window, and ring the bell," said the Duchess of Grand Manors, who hastened to the side of the fainting mother and frightened daughter to render what assistance she might.

Lady Volante followed her instructions.

"Send Greylock here," said the duchess to the footman who answered the bell.

But before the lady's maid could respond to the summons Mrs. Irvine had recovered her consciousness, and with a deep sigh opened her eyes and looked about her.

"You are better, my dear. Here, smell this salts again. Take a deep inhalation of it," said Lady Volante, offering her viniagrette.

But Berry Irvine looked around in a bewildered manner and put her hand to her brow, without speaking.

"You have scarcely recovered yet, dear. Perhaps we had better get you to bed for a while. Do you think you can walk so far as your room?" inquired the duchess.

"Yes," murmured Berry, scarcely conscious of what she was saying, as she passed her hand back and forth acroes her forehead.

"Greylock, come here," said her grace to the waiting-woman, who had just entered the room. "Give Mrs. Irvine your arm, while I support her on the other side. We must get her to her chamber."

And the duchess, with tenderest care, assisted her guest to rise, and would have sustained her, but that the latter said:

"Thanks, thanks, dear duchess. I can do very well with the help of Greylock."

And leaning on the strong arm of the lady's maid, Berry Irvine walked up to her chamber, followed by the duchess and by Isoline.

When she reached that elegant bower she dropped into a resting-chair, and desired everyone except her hostess to leave the apartment.

"Had you not better lie down for a little while, my dear?" inquired her grace.

"No, no; I will sit here. Send them out, please," replied Berry, referring to her daughter and the maid.

Isola and Greylock left the room, closing the door behind them.

The duchess stepped to the door and turned the key..

Then coming back to her guest, she drew a chair and sat down beside the latter, saying:

"You have something to confide in me."

"Yes, I have something to confide in you," admitted the widow, passing her hand in a perplexed manner to and fro across her brow.

"Then speak out freely, my love. You know you may trust me," said her grace.

But Berry only looked the more perplexed and answered by a moan.

"Let me help you. Were you affected by anything I read in the paper?"

Mrs. Irvine started and stared in terror upon her questioner.

"I was reading the obituary notice of the Princess Zavieski when you suddenly fainted. Is it anything in relation to that lady that you wish to confide in me?"

But Berry Irvine only stared at her questioner.

"Were you in any manner whatever connected with the late princess?"

Berry strove to recover her lost faculties and answered slowly:

"Why, no—I—did not know the—princess. Who was she?"

"Zavieski."

"I really do not think I ever heard of her in all my life before. Oh, no! My fainting had nothing to do with what you were reading. If the subject had been the marriage of a peasant instead of the death of a princess, I must have fainted all the same," said the widow, with a sigh, but with perfect calmness, for she had recovered her self-control.

"Was it the heat of the room, my love?"

"No, dear duchess, it was—and this is what I have to confide in you—it was heart disease."

"'Heart disease!' Oh, my dear Berry, no! You must be mistaken," said the duchess, scarcely able to conceal her dismay.

"Ah, no! I wish there were room for doubt. I have atrophy of the heart. It is a fatal disorder," gravely replied the widow.

"Oh, why should you say so? How can you know?"

"I had suspected it long, from certain symptoms. When I was in London a month ago I took the best medical advice upon the subject, and then I had my suspicions confirmed."

"I am very sorry to hear it. I think it was very wrong in the physicians to tell you anything of the kind."

"No, it was right, under the circumstances. I explained to Sir Henry Cooper that I had a young orphan daughter for whom some provision should be made before my death, and he advised me to lose no time in making provision for her; for though with care I might live for years, any imprudence or excitement might bring about my death at any moment."

"Oh, Berry! And you can speak so calmly of this!"

"Why not? Death is as natural as birth. Why should it be feared? My only care is my child—my poor Isola! I am sorry she saw me faint. It alarmed her so much. I never fainted in her presence before."

"Have you ever fainted before, Berry?"

"Ah! yes, several times lately, but never in her presence. I have sometimes fainted alone in my chamber, and recovered without assistance; but never until to-day in my child's sight. Poor girl! It alarmed her so much! It will make her so anxious! I did not wish her to know! I did not! And for her only am I troubled."

"Can I do anything to relieve you of this anxiety, Berry?"

"Yes, dear duchess. Yesterday you mentioned your great desire to procure a music mistress for your daughters with half the ability of Isoline."

"I did, most earnestly."

"Well, then, dear duchess, Isoline is quite at your service, if you will take her," said the widow.

"What do you tell me? Are you really sincere? Should you indeed be willing that your daughter should take such a position in my family?" inquired the duchess, in half-doubtful pleasure.

"Indeed, dear friend, I should," replied the widow emphatically.

"Yet only yesterday, when I ventured to hint at such an arrangement, you made me feel by your manner that my wish was a presumptuous one," smiled the duchess.

"Yesterday I had not this grave warning of the precarious tenure of my life. Other fainting fits I have had, but nothing so serious as this. Yesterday I cherished hopes of living a few years longer, for I meant to be very quiet and prudent; but to-day, without excitement, without imprudence, without any assignable cause, I fainted away while sitting still in my chair. This circumstance assures me that, live as calmly as I may, I cannot live long."

"Oh, Berry!"

"Let that pass. I think now only of my child, who would be left destitute by my death. You asked me if I should be willing that she should take the position of a music teacher in your family. Had you asked me that question yesterday I should have answered—No; that I was not willing; that I wished to keep her at home with me; but when you ask me to-day, I answer—Yes; that I am not only willing, but anxious to have her take the posi-

tion you offer her. I shall be glad and grateful to know that should I be taken suddenly away, she will have a home in your house and a friend in you."

"I think I can promise all that, and more, for your child, Berry! I can promise that Isoline shall be considered and treated as a daughter of the house."

"You are very good, duchess. You shall have Isoline. I must return to Stony Fells to-morrow; but, if you please, I will leave Isoline with you."

"No, no, no, my dear Berry! I will not accept such a sacrifice as that! Isoline must not leave you in your feeble health!"

"Ah! but it's for Isoline's good that she should remain here," said the widow.

"But I will not accept the sacrifice, even for her sake. I tell you what I will do. I will engage your daughter as the music teacher of my children from this day. But she shall live with you as long as you live. I will send the carriage for her three times a week, and bring her here in the morning and return her to you in the evening, so long as you live to require her company; but if you should pass away, as I hope and believe you will not for many years to come, I will bring her here to make her permanent home with us. Will that plan be agreeable to you, Berry?"

"Oh, perfectly! perfectly! No one but your lovely self would ever have thought of it!" exclaimed the widow, taking and pressing the hand of the duchess to her lips.

"Now do not get excited over me, my dear. I pray you lie down on your bed and rest a while."

"No, no! I will not go to bed! I do not want to sleep! I want to look at this bright world as much as possible, before the long, long sleep shuts it forever from my view—forever."

"Ah, do not talk so! And remember that when our material, bodily eyes close upon this 'bright world,' our spiritual eyes open upon a far brighter one. But you look so weary. At least consent to lie down upon the sofa. You can look from that through the south window on the land. Let me lead you to the sofa."

"As you please, dear duchess," said Berry languidly, as she gave her hand to her hostess.

Supporting the invalid, the duchess led her to the sofa and laid her on it.

At that moment there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Berry languidly.

Greylock entered, with a card on a waiter, which she brought to the duchess, saying that the porter had just sent it up.

"The Earl of Hawkewood," read the duchess; then turning to Berry Irvine, she said:

"You will excuse me, my dear. Greylock will remain with you."

"Thanks, dearest friend; but I will just ask Mrs. Greylock to be good enough to close the windows and leave the room. I think I will take your advice and try to sleep," wearily replied Berry.

"That is right, love. And, Greylock, place the bell tassel within reach of Mrs. Irvine, and do you remain within call, if she should need anything."

The lady's maid did all that was required of her and then followed the duchess from the chamber, closing the door after her.

What a metamorphosis then passed over the languid woman!

She half rose upon her elbow and listened, while her black eyes burned with a fierce fire.

Then she sprang up, darted to the door and turned the key.

Soon she gave way to the wildest paroxysm of passion.

Clasping her hands above her head with a gesture of fierce despair, or mortal anguish, she began to walk up and down the floor, wringing and twisting her fingers together, and muttering hoarsely in bitter pain:

"It is ended! It *is* ended! The long deception, the two-fold life—it is ended suddenly at last! Oh, Isoline! Oh, my child, must I give you up! Give you up forever! Never look upon your face! Never hear your voice! Never clasp your hand! Live in the same world with you for half a century or more—for we are a very long-lived race—and never dare to meet you! Oh, Isola, my child! I never knew how much I loved you, my only one, until now! Yet it is for your sake! for yours! that I do what I must do!

that I did what I have done! We could never have borne grinding poverty, you nor I! Yet, oh, to leave you so! To leave you so! To never see you nor hear of you after this! It is worse than death!"

More wild words she spoke as she walked, reeling, up and down the floor, wringing her hands, beating her breast, giving way to the most frantic expressions of anguish and despair.

But there was no look of heart disease in the fine, strong eyes, tortured with passion, no appearance of weakness in the beautiful, strong arms, writhing like serpents in agony above her head.

A knock came to the door.

She stopped her wild walk, listened, trembled, but did not answer.

The knock was reiterated and followed by the voice of Isoline, saying, pleadingly:

"It is I, dear mamma—Isoline. Are you better, dear mamma? May I come in?"

"The room is darkened. She will not see me plainly. I must let her in, "muttered the agitated mother, as she went and opened the door.

"Oh, mamma! Are you better?" anxoiusly inquired the young girl, as she put her arms around her mother.

"Yes, love," replied the lady, speaking with more tenderness than she had shown her daughter since that daughter's childhood. "Yes, love, I am better. Do not be alarmed, Isoline. Fainting fits are very common among women, although I, being a very strong and healthy woman, have never had one before."

"Sit down, dear mamma! Do not stand! I will sit by you," said the girl, drawing her mother toward the sofa. "What caused you to faint, mamma!" she inquired, when they were seated, side by side.

"Two agents, my dear; the tightness of my dress—for I am so well and growing so stout that my clothes are all too small for me—and the heat of the room, for we who are accustomed to the loose window frames and doors of dilapidated Stony Fells, that let in 'a' the airts o' Heaven,' cannot stand the close warmth of these luxurious parlors, curtained off from every draught of wind and almost from

every breath of fresh air. You must yourself have felt the heat of the room!"

"Yes, dear mamma, I did; but my dress was not tight, so I did not grow faint," replied the unsuspicious girl.

"Isoline, my love," said the lady, putting her arms around her daughter's waist and drawing her close to her bosom—"Isoline, my child, do you love me?"

"Oh, yes, dear mamma. Whom else in the world have I to love but you?" replied the girl, fondly returning her mother's caress.

"Did you ever think that I did not love you, my daughter?" gravely inquired the lady.

"Oh, no, mamma. I always knew that you did love me," earnestly replied the girl.

"And yet, since your childhood I have seldom manifested any affection for you. Did not you think that was unkind, Isola?"

"No, dear mamma, I never thought so."

"What did you think?"

"I do not know. Perhaps—that it was your way. Or—that I had grown too big to be petted like a baby," replied the girl, with a slight smile.

"And you did not miss these withheld caresses?" inquired the lady, with more anxiety than the subject seemed to explain.

"Yes, mamma, I missed them," replied the young girl, slowly and hesitatingly; "but I did not think you unloving," she hastened to say.

"And was the loss of these manifestations of affection from me the cause of your great depression of spirits, Isoline?"

"I—do not know, mamma. Partly, perhaps. But the chief cause of my unhappiness was the dreary monotony of our lives at Stony Fells," truthfully replied Isoline.

"Well, my dear girl, that is all over now," said the lady, with a smile.

"Oh, mamma, what do you mean?" inquired the girl, as her dark eyes beamed with hope.

"Your life shall henceforth have more bright variety in it, my love."

"Oh, mamma! How?"

"You can live here in this gay castle. The Duchess of Grand Manors has offered you, through me, the situation of music teacher to her daughters, and you can live with them here, or in their town house in London, or at their marine residence at Scarborough, on a footing with the children of the family."

"Oh, mamma! How delightful! But you?—you?" exclaimed the girl, her tone quickly changing from pure rapture to affectionate anxiety.

"I should remain at Stony Fells, happy in the thought that you were happy!"

"Alone, mamma?"

"Of course, alone."

"Then I will not take the place. I will not leave you. I could not be happy, dear mamma, knowing you to be alone in that dreary house," said Isoline tenderly.

"My good, true child!" murmured the mother, pressing her daughter to her bosom as the tears sprang to her dark eyes.

"We are but two, you and I, mamma. Let us not be separated. Let us bear our lives together," whispered Isoline, with a kiss.

"My good, true child, "repeated Mrs. Irvine, as the tears rained from her eyes.

"I will not give way to gloom when we return to Stony Fells, mamma. I will battle against depression. Indeed, I will try to be cheerful, and I will be cheerful," said the girl bravely.

"And you will sacrifice all your bright prospects and go back to Stony Fells with me, my child?" murmured the lady, in softened tones, as she gazed on the beautiful, earnest face of the girl.

"No, mamma, I shall sacrifice nothing. I could not be happy anywhere, knowing you to be alone in that dreary house," smiled Isoline.

"My own girl! But there is a way, Isoline, in which you can enjoy some of the advantages of the new life opening before you, without leaving me alone."

"Is there, mamma? Oh, that would be glorious! But how could it be done?"

"The good duchess herself showed the way, for she, like

yourself, could not bear the thought of having me left alone."

"No, no," murmured Isoline.

"So she proposes that you shall return with me to Stony Fells and remain there as in your permanent home. And that she shall send the carriage for you, three mornings out of every week—say Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—and bring you to the castle here to give music lessons to her daughters in the forenoon and send you back to me in the afternoon, so that you shall never sleep a night away from me. What do you think of that plan, Isola? Is it agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly agreeable, dear mamma!" eagerly replied the girl.

"Just the answer I made to the duchess when she first proposed the plan, my dear."

"Oh, how good of her! No one but the good duchess—no one but herself would have thought of such a compromise!" exclaimed the girl, with enthusiastic gratitude.

"Almost the exact comment I made myself, dear girl," smiled the lady.

"You think the matter may be considered as settled, dear mamma?" rather anxiously inquired Isoline, for the prospect opening before her seemed too pleasant to be real.

"I know it may be considered settled, my love. I know you may enter upon your duties as soon, after we return home, as you please."

"We are in no hurry to return, however, dear mamma. I think the duchess expects us to stay at least a week. And the visit is doing you good, notwithstanding the unpleasant episode of your fainting fit. You have got over that now. You feel much better, do you not, mamma?"

"Much better, my dear. You will help me to dress. I will go down to luncheon, if only to reassure our friends, and because it is our last day here."

"Our last day, mamma?"

"Yes, love, for I have business that requires my attention, so that we must return home to-morrow. But before we go we will arrange that you shall commence your duties here on Monday, so you will be interested and occupied."

"I was only thinking of you, mamma."

"Oh, I shall be quite satisfied, love. Come now; help me to dress. I do not want to call Greylock."

Isoline opened one window shutter to give light, and then proceeded to assist in the toilet of her mother, whose features had quite regained their composure.

CHAPTER XVI

DEMONDIKE GIVES UP THE SECRET

What's become of Berry
Since she crossed the ferry?—NEVILLE.
Drowned! Drowned!—SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the luncheon bell rang Mrs. Irvine and Miss Irvine descended to the pleasant room where that refreshment was usually laid.

There they found only the duchess, Lady Volante, and the Earl of Hawkewood. The little ladies Belle Isle were not present. They were in the schoolroom as yet, and were never permitted to join the family at luncheon when there happened to be a gentleman visitor present.

As Mrs. Irvine entered the room the duchess went to meet her, saying, in a low tone:

"I am so glad to see you are well enough to join us."

"You are so good to me," murmured Berry Irvine.

"Lord Hawkewood—Mrs. Irvine, of Stony Fells," said the duchess, turning and presenting the young earl to the beautiful widow.

The gentleman and the lady bowed simultaneously.

"Most happy to meet Mrs. Irvine," said his lordship.

"Lord Hawkewood—Miss Irvine," continued the duchess, presenting the young earl to the young lady.

"Very happy to know Miss Irvine," said his lordship, with a bow that Isoline returned by a slight bend of her head.

The small party of five took their places at the round table, and formed a very social little circle.

Every repast served on the board of Castle Belle Isle

possessed its own peculiar excellence; but the lunches were considered the most attractive and appetizing of any in the county.

The latest guest, the young Earl of Hawkewood, had certainly come on a special visit to the Lady Volante Belle Isle; but being the only gentleman at the table he was too much a man of society to confine his attentions to one beauty. He distributed his small services and smaller talk very equally between the four ladies present; and—wonderful success!—managed to please them all!

He had been really disappointed at missing the duke, with whom he had intended to have that interview of which he had spoken at Hawkewood Hall, "on a subject intimately connected with his whole life's hope and happiness;" but now he seemed amply compensated for the duke's absence, especially as he had accepted an invitation from the duchess not only to lunch but to dine at the castle.

When the elegant little repast was over the party went out to the lawn for a game of croquet, the duchess and the earl playing against Lady Volante Belle Isle and Isoline Irvine, while Mrs. Irvine, seated in a garden-chair, looked on, and stitched at her embroidery.

An hour before the dressing or first dinner bell rang the Duke of Grand Manors and the Marquis of Belle Isle returned from their shooting tramp in the preserves of Bowling Green, and after cordially greeting the young earl, paused in their picturesque shooting-suits to look on at the game of croquet. But when the game then in progress came to an end, and the two young ladies were declared victors over the duchess and the earl, the whole party went into the house to dress for dinner.

On their way in, the young earl managed to get beside the duke for a few moments, and then asked his grace if at any time during the evening he could give him a private interview.

"Yes, surely. Now, if you wish. There is plenty of time before the bell rings," replied the duke, as he opened the door of a small reception room, and led his visitor in.

"Now then, my lad," said the duke, as soon as they were seated, "speak out. Perhaps it will help you if I say that I know all about it beforehand, for I had to go through the

same ordeal myself about twenty-five years ago, and have not forgotten it up to this time. Speak out."

"Your grace is very good. I came, then, to say—say ——" the young earl hesitated for a moment, and then continued—"that I love your fair daughter, the Lady Volante Belle Isle—and—and—and——"

"Have you spoken to Volly?" abruptly demanded the duke.

"No, your grace. I was about to ask your——"

"Then how in the deuce am I to give you an answer until I know her mind?" again interrupted the duke.

"I was about to ask your grace's sanction to my addresses," replied the young earl.

"Oh, ho! That is it! You begin at the right end! An unusual proceeding in a country where, instead of asking papa's leave to address the daughter, the young fellows invariably ask the daughter's leave to 'speak to papa,'" laughed the duke.

"Am I to understand, then, that your grace kindly permits me to——"

"Make a fool of yourself?—Certainly, my dear lad, if you choose to do so! As a free-born Briton you have the right——

" 'For Britons never, never, never will be slaves!'

"Seriously, my dear Hawkewood, you have my full approbation to your suit and my warmest wishes for its success," said the duke cordially, offering his hand to his prospective son-in-law.

The young earl pressed it earnestly, as he said:

"Your grace has made me a very happy and a very grateful man."

"Nay, nay, Volly must do that! And now be off with you to learn your fate from her lips, and leave me to get myself ready for dinner."

The young earl bowed and left the room.

The duke hurried up to his dressing-room, but before beginning his toilet he looked in upon the duchess, who was sitting before her looking-glass, having her hair arranged by the hands of her maid.

"Send your woman away, my dear; I wish to speak to you," said the duke.

"You may leave the room," said the duchess.

The maid courtesied and retired.

"Now, then, you tiresome person, what is it?" inquired the duchess, with a smile.

"Hawkewood has proposed for Volly," said the duke.

"Yes! I presumed that he had come to do that."

"But he has not yet spoken to her. Rather an odd way of proceeding, eh?"

"It strikes me as the proper way, however."

"Well, what I wish to say to you, my dear, is just this: Tell Volly she had better accept Hawkewood."

"I will advise her to do so; but, of course, she must be permitted to act as she pleases in a matter so entirely, and so vitally concerning herself."

"She will be a great fool is she does not take him."

"That is a mere matter of opinion. And now, please ring the bell to recall my maid, and go and change your dress, or you will be late for dinner," said the duchess.

The duke complied with her request and then left the room.

Half an hour later the family and the guests were assembled around the dinner table.

By the radiant looks of the young earl the duke imagined that he had already laid his coronet at the feet of Lady Volante, and that she had accepted it.

But the duchess knew that this was not the case, as Lady Volante had remained in her dressing-room until the last dinner bell rang and had then gone directly to the drawing-room, where the whole party was assembled, so that the earl could have had no opportunity of speaking to the lady in private.

That opportunity was to be afforded him after dinner.

When the three courses and the dessert that composed the dinner had been discussed, the ladies arose, and, leaving the gentlemen to their wine, retired to the drawing-room.

Here they divided. Mrs. Irvine took her daughter's arm and led her away for a *tête-à-tête*, leaving the duchess and Lady Volante together.

"Sit down here, my love; I have something to ask you," said the duchess.

Lady Volante seated herself beside her mother and looked up with a questioning, attentive face.

"Do you know, my love, what motive brought Lord Hawkewood here to-day?" inquired the duchess.

"I think I do, mamma."

"Ah! then he has found an opportunity of proposing to you! What was your answer, my dear? I hope it was a favorable one."

"Lord Hawkewood has not yet distinctly proposed to me, mamma."

"He has not! Then how came you to know the object of his visit?"

"I judged by the calculus of probabilities, mamma," said the young lady, smiling.

"Then you have judged that you yourself are the object of his lordship's visit?"

"Yes, mamma."

"He has been with your father this afternoon. He has asked permission to address you."

"Yes, mamma."

"Your father has given him that permission."

"I supposed he would."

"And the earl will propose for you this evening. Now, Volante, what do you intend to do?"

"I shall accept the earl," said the young lady.

A look of surprise and pleasure came into the face of the duchess.

She had believed her daughter's attachment to the late earl would interfere with any thoughts of marriage with the present one.

She had anticipated some difficulty in persuading Lady Volante to accept Lord Hawkewood.

Now the young beauty had coolly announced her intention of marrying the earl.

"Do you really like him?" inquired the duchess.

"I really like Hawkewood Hall and its rent roll. It is near Belle Isle, so that I need not be separated from my own people, and it yields fifty thousand pounds a year, so that I shall have enough to live upon myself, and enough

to help my sisters and brothers," quietly replied the young lady.

"But, my dear child, do you like him?" inquired the mother in a troubled tone, for her own marriage with the duke had been a love match.

"I do not like him as well as I could have liked his cousin, the late earl, who was really very attractive and interesting; but I do not dislike the present Lord Hawkewood. And, as I said before, mamma, he is an earl, he has fifty thousand pounds a year, and his seat, Hawkewood Hall, is near Belle Isle. You see, mamma, there are good reasons why I should accept him when he offers."

"Good reasons in my eyes and your father's, my dear; but hardly good reasons in a young bride's. I wish you cared more for him."

"Dear mamma, one cannot have everything they would like in this imperfect world. I dare say, now, if I got to care so much for any young gentlemna as to render him essential to my happiness, he would be poor, or of humble position, or his home would be in some distant part of the country, and you and papa would oppose the match, and so on, and so on," said Lady Volante.

The duchess sighed.

"And such being the case, mamma, I have decided to take the goods the gods provide by taking the Earl of Hawkewood, country seat, town house, and revenues."

"I am glad you will marry him," said the duchess; but she sighed.

The entrance of the gentlemen broke up the *tête-à-tête*.

Tea was brought in.

After that was served, Mrs. Irvine and Miss Irvine, at the request of the duke, went to the piano and sang and played several fine selections from popular operas.

The drawing-room was a long one. While the music maniacs were gathered around the piano at one end of the room, the Earl of Hawkewood, standing beside Lady Volante Belle Isle at a booktable at the other end, improved the opportunity by making an offer of his heart and hand, which was frankly accepted by her ladyship.

Then, as the music ceased, the polite young hypocrites, who had not heard one word of the songs or duets, went

forward and thanked the fair musicians for the pleasure they had given them.

And, finally, the earl took leave of the family, and went home the happiest man in the three kingdoms.

The circle broke up for the night.

Early the next morning Mrs. and Miss Irvine left Castle Belle Isle for Stony Fells, with the understanding that the latter should return on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to give music lessons to the young ladies.

"We will send our old coachman with the carriage for her every time, and send her back safe in the evening," were the last words of the duchess to her favorite at parting.

But there was one of the ducal household who looked so miserably crestfallen after the departure that the duchess had to console him by saying:

"Cheer up, Cosmo! This is Friday. And on Monday you will see her again."

"I am truly grieved to hear that Mrs. Irvine has a fatal heart malady," said the young man, by way of turning the conversation from an embarrassing point.

"My good lad, I fear poor Berry's head is more affected than her heart. She has really seemed very strange for the last few days," said the duchess thoughtfully.

"Do you know, mamma, that it really seemed so to me? Mrs. Irvine has been so moody, so eccentric, and so absent-minded, that indeed I have not been able to understand her," added Lady Volante.

"Poor little woman! She has had her own troubles," sighed the duchess.

No more was said on the subject at that time between the mother and the daughter, but before twenty-four hours had passed and gone a strange and terrible event occurred that seemed to be a practical illustration of their opinions.

The next morning, as the duke, the duchess, and their eldest son and daughter and nephew were still seated at the breakfast table, the hall footman opened the door and announced:

"Miss Irvine."

And Isoline Irvine, pale, frightened, and trembling, tottered into the room, and might have fallen had not

Cosmo Belle Isle started up and caught her and placed her in a chair.

The whole party left the table and gathered around her.

"My dear child, what has happened?" inquired the duchess, while the duke poured out a glass of wine and made her drink it.

"What has happened, Isoline?" again inquired the duchess.

"Oh, madam! Mamma! mamma!" cried the girl, bursting into a paroxysm of tears.

"What ails her, my dear child? Speak, Isoline! Is she ill? Is she——" The duchess did not finish her question.

"Oh, madam, she is gone! gone! gone! Mamma is gone!" sobbed the girl, wildly wringing her hands.

"Dead?" inquired the duke, in a sympathetic tone.

"Oh, sir! I don't know! But she is gone! gone! Oh, mamma! mamma! Oh, pardon me! I ought not to give way so! I ought not to behave so badly! But I cannot help it! I cannot! Oh, mamma, mamma!"

"My poor child, try to compose yourself sufficiently to give some coherent account. You say your mother is gone, love?" inquired the duchess.

"Oh, yes! She is gone! gone! gone!" exclaimed the girl, wringing and twisting her fingers in an agony of grief.

"But where has she gone, my dear?" asked the duke.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know! I did hope that she might be here, but the porter told me she was not! Oh, it killed my last hope! Oh, mamma! mamma!"

"Come with me," said the duchess tenderly, taking the girl's hand and leading her out of the breakfast room and across the hall into a cozy little reception room, where she made her lie down on the lounge.

Then the duchess closed and locked the door and drew a chair to the sofa and seated herself beside the grieving girl, saying:

"Now that we are quite alone, my dear, try to compose your mind and collect your faculties so as to give me an intelligible account of what has happened. You say your mamma has gone?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" sobbed Isoline.

"You do not know where she has gone?"

"Oh, no, madam, no! I don't know! No one knows! I did hope, with a forlorn hope, that she was here."

"When did she go, my dear child?"

"Oh, I do not know. During the night or early this morning before anyone was up! Oh, mamma! Oh, mamma!"

"Do try to be calm, my love. Do you mean that your mother left her home without telling anyone?—without taking leave of you?"

"Oh, yes, madam! Yes!"

"Incredible!"

"Oh, madam, I think she was—was—was—a little beside herself! She acted so strangely after we got home yesterday."

"In what manner, Isoline?"

"I can hardly tell you! In her looks, in her speech, in her actions! It is painful to talk of it, madam."

"When did you see your mamma last?"

"When she kissed me good-night at ten o'clock. We sleep in adjoining rooms, with the door open between us. She came into my room after I was in bed, and she sat down by me and asked me if I loved her, and she asked me if she were to leave me suddenly whether I would not try to be happy with the friends I had found."

"I understand her motive, my dear. She thought she had disease of the heart. I think now that she was mistaken. Go on."

"I told mamma no friends would compensate for the loss of one's mother. Then she kissed me many times, and prayed the Lord to bless me, and so she left me and went to her own room and put out the light. I did not go to sleep for a long time. I was so disturbed by what mamma had said."

"Poor girl!"

"I lay and listened to hear if she should move or speak, but everything was quite still, and so I thought she was asleep; and, after a long time, I went to sleep myself and slept late into this morning. When I woke up I went into mamma's room and found her bed empty. I thought she had risen and gone downstairs. I went down as soon as I

was dressed. But Lona Pond told me that my mamma had not been seen since last night, and they were all wondering how it was that we slept so late. Oh, madam, I cannot tell you! I cannot tell you! How we waited for her, thinking that maybe she had gone for a walk—though she was not in the habit of doing so. And then how we searched and inquired, first around the house and then around the neighborhood. Only one person gave any information."

"Then you did get some information," hastily interrupted the duchess.

"Ah, yes—alarming information! It was from one of the coast—guardsman—Dennis Prout—who said that when he was going down to the coast to take his morning watch at four o'clock in the morning, long before daylight, he met a woman on the banks of the Demondike. She was walking alone at that hour, and seemed to try to avoid observation. So he flashed the bull's-eye of his lantern into her face, as he said it was his duty as a coast guardsman to do to all suspicious persons, and then he saw that it was Mrs. Irvine of Stony Fells! That made me hope with a forlorn hope that she had started out before day to walk here! So I hurried on here as fast as I could to try to find her. But she is not here! Oh, mamma! mamma!"

"My dear child, do you tell me that your poor mother was seen walking alone in the dead hours of darkness before day on the brink of the Demondike?" inquired the duchess, in consternation.

"Oh, yes, madam! Yes! Oh, where can she be now? Oh, where is mamma?"

"Where, indeed?" thought the panic-stricken duchess; but for the afflicted daughter's sake she gave no utterance to that thought.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

We are the fools of time and terror; days
Steal on us, and steal from us; yet we live,
Wasting our life, and dreading still to die.
In all the days of this oppressive yoke,
This vital weight, upon the struggling heart,
Which sinks with sorrow, or beats quick with pain,
Or joy that ends in agony, or faintness—
In all the days of past and future, for
In life there is no present, we may number.
How few, how less than few, wherein the soul
Forbears to pant for death, and yet draws back
As from a stream in winter, though the chill
Be but a moment's —BYRON'S "MANFRED."

ISOLINE IRVINE shuddered with terror.

"You must remain here, my dear girl, until a thorough search is made for your mamma," said the duchess kindly.

"Oh, madam, will you assist me in the search?" inquired the girl, clasping her hands and lifting her eyes in the earnestness of her appeal.

"Surely, surely, my dear child; but we must consult our friends as to the best means of proceeding," said the duchess, as she arose and touched the bell.

A footman answered the summons.

"Give my respects to the gentlemen in the breakfast room, and ask them to be so good as to step hither," said the duchess.

The footman bowed and disappeared.

His exit was almost immediately followed by the entrance of the duke, the marquis, and the young lieutenant.

In a low tone, and in a few brief words, the duchess told the duke, in the hearing of the others, the alarming facts relating to the disappearance of Mrs. Irvine, as they had been imparted to her by Isoline.

"Where have you already inquired?" questioned the duke, turning to the young girl.

"Oh, everywhere where it is probable or possible that she might be. First, at the rectory; but Dr. Vincent had neither seen nor heard anything of mamma since he met her at church last Sunday. And then at the cottages of the poor people she is in the habit of visiting; but nowhere, nowhere could I hear of her, except from Dennis Prout, who—in the darkest hours before day—saw her—wandering—on the brink of Demondike," answered Isoline, her voice faltering and breaking down at the close of her speech.

The duke put a few more questions, but elicited no more information in addition to what he had already received from the duchess.

"Try to be tranquil, my child," said the duke, "and rely upon me for having proper measures taken for the discovery of this poor lady."

And with these words he left the room, followed by his son and his nephew.

The duchess took Isoline upstairs to her own private apartments, where she made the girl lay off her jacket and hat, and bathe her head.

Lady Volante came in, showing her sympathy, not in direct words, but by the kindness and consideration of her manner.

In the meantime, the duke wrote letters to the chief of police at the Hawkeville station, and at other stations, notifying them of the mysterious disappearance of the lady of Stony Fells, and urging them to active measures for the discovery of her retreat, or of her fate.

The hours passed slowly and heavily with Isoline, and with all who by sympathy shared her distress and anxiety.

But the morning glowed into noon and faded into evening without bringing any intelligence of the missing lady.

Isoline, in the anguish of her suspense, would have started off again to Stony Fells, in the forlorn hope of finding that her mother had returned home, but the duke assured her that a man was stationed at the old manor house, with orders to bring the first news of the lady's arrival—should she return thither—immediately to Castle Belle Isle, and the duchess would not let her stir from the place.

The troubled day was followed by a terrible night.

Isoline did not even make a pretense of going to bed or

to sleep; but she walked the floor of her chamber all night, closely watched by Mrs. Greylock, who had orders from the duchess not to leave the young lady.

With the coming of light came also hope that the day might bring some news.

It did bring news, but not, ah! not of the sort to cheer the spirits.

It was soon after breakfast that Mr. Traverse, the steward, came to Castle Belle Isle and inquired for the duke.

Being asked into the library, where the three gentlemen of the castle were seated in council, he entered, bowing, and baring a parcel tied up in brown paper in his hands.

"Well, Mr. Traverse, you asked to see me! What can I do for you this morning? But pray be seated. You look weary," said the duke, pointing to a chair.

"Yes, your grace. I thank your grace, I am a bit spent, walking all the way from Demondike," replied the steward, sinking into the indicated chair, putting his parcel down at his feet, drawing a red bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and beginning to wipe his flushed and moistened forehead.

"It is a warm day for the third week in September," said Lieut. Bell eIsle.

"Yes, captain, it is, your honor; and I would not have walked all the way from Demondike to Belle Isle if I had not had news concerning the missing lady."

"Ah!" exclaimed the three gentlemen in a breath, all becoming immediately attentive.

"This bundle," continued the steward, lifting the brown paper parcel at his feet and beginning to untie it—"contains some articles found on the brink of Demondike, and among the rocks and briars, half way down to the water."

The three gentlemen drew near the steward, who proceeded to exhibit the contents of his parcel.

"This fragment of black cashmere was found tangled in the briars, a few feet below the bank," continued the steward, exhibiting the remnant that seemed to have been caught on thorns and violently torn off from its dress.

"It is a portion of a woman's gown, and looks as if it might have been part of Mrs. Irvine's. She wore a black

dress, I remember," said the duke, taking the piece and examining it carefully.

"This came out of the torn pocket of that fragment in your hand. Observe, sir, it has a name in the corner," cantinued the steward, exhibiting a ragged white linen cambric pocket handkerchief.

"This looks ill! It is Mrs. Irvine's name on the corner! See! 'Berry Irvine!'" exclaimed the duke, in a troubled tone.

"And nearly on a level with the water at high tide, this was found, sir," said the steward, taking from the bottom of the parcel a sodden and battered mass that proved to be a lady's black felt hat and feather, which was immediately recognized as the property of Mrs. Irvine.

The duke groaned as he looked at it.

"Who found these articles, and under what circumstances?" he then inquired.

"I, myself, and one of the men from the hall, your grace. The way was this: The report went around that the lady of Stony Fells was missing, and that she had been last seen on the banks of the Demondike, near the old stone bridge, in the dark hours before day; and the theory was that she had started to walk to Castle Belle Isle, and the fear was that in crossing the old stone bridge, where there are no parapets, she had missed her footing in the dark, and had fallen into the abyss."

"A natural and terrible conclusion! That is a very dangerous bridge to cross either on a dark night or a windy day; one might easily miss his footing in the night, or be blown over in the day. That bridge ought to have been attended to long ago," said the duke.

"So it ought, sir! And I went there this morning with one of the laborers from the estate, who is a stone mason, to see about building a parapet to defend passengers from falling over the bridge.

"An instance of the forethought shown in 'locking the stable door after the steed is stolen,' eh, Traverse?"

"Well, your grace, I'm afeared it was something like that; but your grace must know that no accident of the kind had ever happened before, and though people often said to me: 'That bridge is dangerous and somebody will

fall over it and be drowned some of these days,' why, we all thought as it had stood so long and no one lost their lives by it yet, it might stand a little longer, so there was no hurry."

"Until some one should meet with a fatal accident, as this unfortunate lady may have done."

"Well, your grace, it was very unfortunate, and we all feel very much cut up by it, and as soon as ever we heard the report that the unlucky lady had fallen over the bridge I set off at once with the stone mason to see to building the parapet."

" 'Locking the stable door after the steed was stolen.' "

"Yes, your grace, because there were other steeds that might be stolen—that is to say, other people might have fallen over that unguarded bridge."

"You have the duke there, Traverse," put in the young lieutenant.

"Ay, captain, your honor, I have. But his grace was asking me how and about the finding of these relics," said the steward.

"Yes, and I would be glad to hear," observed the duke.

"Then, your grace, it was while we were examining the sides of the bridge that we saw a trail off one end of it, as if somebody had fallen or something had been dragged over the side at the end and down the rocky bank. The bushes and briars that grew in the crevices of the rocks in the chasm were bent, torn, or broken down. On looking closer we found this rent and tattered fragment of a woman's dress, with the pocket attached to it and the torn handkerchief half out of it. It looked as if the lady had fallen over the side of the bridge soon after stepping upon it, and that her pocket had been caught by the briar and torn off by her fall. Away down the bank we saw the crushed hat, and we had to send for grappling hooks before we could reach it to get it up. 'Pears to me, your grace, that there can be no doubt now as to what has become of the poor lady," concluded the steward.

"No doubt whatever," said the duke with a deep sigh.

"And as that is all I had to communicate to your grace, I will now take my leave—begging leave first to assure your grace and the gentlemen present that no more accidents

shall happen through that unguarded bridge, for the men are now at work upon the parapet."

"I wish they had been set to work a week earlier, however," said the implacable duke.

"Had not the dike better be dragged, uncle?" inquired the lieutenant.

" 'Dragged,' my boy? You might as well 'drag' Niagara Falls with any hope of finding a body that had fallen over them! The dike at every high tide becomes a rushing, roaring, impetuous torrent, carrying everything before it! That unhappy lady's body has been swept out to sea, and wherever it may be found, if ever it be found, it will not be in Demondike."

"Is there, under these circumstances, even a possibility of its recovery?" inquired the young marquis.

"I think so—a bare possibility. It may be thrown up by the sea, or washed ashore," replied the duke.

"My lord, the Earl of Hawkewood, seeing that the accident happened on his estate, has already authorized me to instruct the police to offer a large reward, in his name, for the recovery of the body," said the steward, still lingering near the library door with his hat in his hand.

"And you have done so?"

"Yes, your grace. His lordship being much interested in the repair of that dangerous bridge, came down to the dike while the stone mason and myself were there, and in fact just after we had recovered these relics, and being convinced, by seeing them, that a fatal accident had happened to the poor lady, he told me to stop at the police station and tell the chief to offer two hundred pounds for the recovery of that body. The police station was right on my way to the castle, and I stopped there and did as my lord had commanded. The placards are out by this time, I dare say."

"Thanks. That will do, Traverse! We will not detain you any longer," said the duke.

"Good-day, then, your grace. Good-day, gentlemen," returned the steward, bowing himself out.

"And now, in the name of Heaven, who is to tell the unhappy daughter of this catastrophe?" demanded the young lieutenant, in an anxious tone.

"Who could dare do it?" added the young marquis.

"Not I, certainly," replied the duke, with a shudder. "The duchess must break the news to Miss Irvine. Women, by their native tact and delicacy, are fitter for such tasks than men."

The conclave then broke up, and the duke went to seek his wife.

On inquiry, he learned that she was with Miss Irvine, in that young lady's room.

He sent a message to ask to see her grace alone for a few moments.

The duchess returned for an answer that she would go to her boudoir and meet him.

And there, as soon as the pair were alone together, the duke told her of the terribly significant discoveries that had the same morning been made at Demondike.

The duchess was deeply affected.

"Who shall tell Isoline this?" she moaned, with the same hard question that had troubled the gentlemen below stairs.

"My love, you must brace yourself to that severe duty. No one would do it so wisely, so tenderly as yourself," sighed the duke. "I would not tell her to-night! Let her have another night of hope," he added.

"Oh, but this which you call 'hope' is with her an agony of suspense! Let it be ended at once! Let the blow fall! It will hurt her heavily, but it will not kill her! Let it fall now, that she may the more quickly recover from it," replied the duchess.

"As you will, my dear. In this case, most certainly, you know best," said the duke.

"But the body must be put in a condition to meet the shock," murmured the lady, as she went to a small, elegant cabinet, where she kept certain cordials and sedatives, and then she prepared a mixture, pleasant to the taste, supporting and calming to the nerves.

With this, in a beautiful little Bohemian glass, she went to the bedchamber of Isoline, where she had left the young girl reclining on a sofa.

Isoline looked up anxiously.

"Any news? Did the duke send for you to give you any news?" she eagerly inquired.

"Drink this, at once, my love," said her hostess, offering the little cordial that was so attractive to the sight and smell.

"Oh, tell me first, dear duchess, is there any news?" pleaded Isoline, clasping her hands and raising her eyes to the face of her friend.

"Yes, my dear, there is news, not very satisfactiory, however. But drink this. I will not utter another word until you obey me."

Thus constrained, Isoline took the beautiful little glass in her fingers, and smiling faintly, sadi:

"It looks beautiful and smells delicious. It cannot be hard to take. It has also an exquisite taste and a soothing effect," she added, when she had drank the cordial and returned the glass to her friend.

The draught had been compounded to produce a swift and powerful effect.

"Keep your promise now, dear duchess, and tell me news of my dear mamma, if you have any," said Isoline earnestly. But the sharp anxiety had left her face and her voice—soothed down and soothed away by the potent balm that the chemists have christened Donum-Dei.

Then the duchess, having prepared her nerves, began to prepare her mind for the news she was to receive.

"Isoline, do you believe we are all in the hands of an infinitely good and wise Heavenly Father?"

"Surely, I believe so, duchess."

"Do you believe that everything which happens to us, no matter what it may be, happens by the absolute providing, or the permitting, of this infinitely wise and loving Father?"

"Indeed I do! But why do you ask me, duchess? Are you going to tell me anything terrible?" inquired the girl in a calm tone.

"Isoline, you remember the coast guardsman, Prout, told you that he had met Mrs. Irvine, of Stony Fells, wandering on the brink of the Demondike, in the dark hour before day, yesterday morning?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It was a very dangerous place for her, or for anyone to pass at that hour."

"I know it was. I told mamma so when we drove over the bridge in broad daylight on our way here."

"Anyone attempting to cross the bridge in the dark might easily have fallen into the dike."

"What do you mean, duchess? What do you mean?" inquired Isoline quickly, passing her hand to and fro across her forehead.

"My dear child—something has been found in the dike."

"Oh! mamma! mamma! You don't mean mamma!" quickly and anxiously exclaimed the girl; yet without the anguish of pain she must have felt had not her nerves been under the influence of that balmy sedative.

"Oh! no, no, not your mamma, my dear girl, but only some proof to show that the coast guardsman's story was true, and that your mamma did wander along the bank of the Demondike, where he says he saw her in the darkness before day, yesterday morning."

"What was found, duchess?" inquired the girl, with half-stunned anxiety.

"Some fragments of her dress, my dear, looking as if it had been caught in the briars and torn off when—she—missed her footing—and fell," said the duchess, breaking down and faltering, until, with the last words, her voice became choked.

Isoline passed her hand once or twice across her forehead in a bewildered manner, and then raised her eyes in helpless appeal to her hostess and inquired:

"Do they think—that mamma—fell into the dike—and was drowned?"

"My dear girl—my dear Isoline, if she did, it was by the providence or the permission of the Lord," said the duchess in a broken voice.

Again Isoline passed her hand in a troubled way to and fro across her brow, and said:

"I hear you say this as if I heard it not! What is the matter with me that I am so unfeeling? I can think clearly enough, but I cannot feel. I hear you say that, in all human probability, my beloved mamma is drowned, or words to that effect—and yet I cannot feel as if it were true! What is the matter? Am I stupid? Am I dying or

dead?" she heavily inquired, raising her eyes, full of stupid trouble, to the face of the duchess.

"My dear, you must lie down and think all this quietly over, and nerve your soul to bear it. I do not wish you to put it away, but to take it and look at it until you can endure it," said the duchess.

Isoline obeyed mechanically by sinking back on the sofa and lying still.

Then the duchess, taking advantage of the lethargy into which she had thrown the girl, began and gave her a detailed account of the discoveries made at Demondike by the Hawkewood steward and the stone mason, and also informed her of the deductions made by the people from these discoveries.

She told all these facts to Isoline, so that there might be nothing left to tell her afterward.

And the girl heard them with a dull pain, but with a strange apathy that could only have been the effect of the powerful drug.

The duchess then left her to the care of Mrs. Greylock, and went downstairs to join the duke at luncheon.

To all inquiries as to the state of Isoline, she answered that the poor child had heard the whole truth, and was resting quietly under the benign influence of a powerful anodyne and sedative.

"But when the reaction comes?" said the duke.

"It will be bad, but not so bad as the shock would have been had we not prepared her system to receive it," replied the lady.

All the remainder of that day Isoline lay calmly on the sofa, not sleeping, but resting. Toward night she sank into a deep slumber, and in that condition she was undressed and put to bed and watched by Mrs. Greylock.

She slept heavily until morning, and then awoke to the horror and anguish of that reaction of which the duke had spoken, but which, as the duchess had foretold, was much less keen and bitter than it might have proved had the patient not been gradually prepared for it.

The news of the finding of those relics spread throughout the neighborhood and convinced everyone that the beautiful lady of Stony Fells had met her fate in the dark

hours before day on that fatal morning when she was first missed from her home, by losing her footing and falling from the bridge into the dread abyss of Demondike, and that her body had been washed out to sea.

The reward offered for its recovery stimulated the poor fishermen to incredible vigilance and exertions. Two hundred pounds would have made any one of them rich for life, according to their own estimate, and they all neglected their legitimate business to watch the coast for the lost body.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE PALACE ZAVIESKI

Around that house there hangs a solemn gloom;
The step falls timid in each gorgeous room,
Vast, sumptuous, dreary, as some Eastern pile
Where mutes keep watch—a home without a smile.
Noiseless, as silence reigned there like a law,
And the cold luxury saddens into awe
Now when the pomp of somber funeral
Jars into life the melancholy hall,
As some chance wind on mournful autumn wings
Discordant sounds, although from music's strings.
—BULWER.

IN one of the most aristocratic old streets in the west end of London stood the Palace Zavieski—alone.

Any stranger passing by would have taken the place to be a prison, a hospital, or some other public receptacle for guilt or for misery.

It was a vast, square edifice of dark, iron-gray stone, without any architectural beauty whatever. Five rows of lofty windows, with dark oaken shutters, always closed, faced the street. Four of these rows contained seven windows; but the lowest row contained but six, three each side the great double door of oak and iron that gave admittance to the house. A stone wall, surmounted by an iron railing, surrounded the building. Two great yew

trees stood in front and darkly shaded the many windows. An iron gate in the wall admitted to the dark stone steps that led by three short flights up the terraced yard to the front door.

The outside of the house was depressing enough without the great fall of heavy black crape that hung from the handle of the lock and announced that death reigned within.

Seeing that badge of mourning on a house of such pretensions, in such a neighborhood, one would naturally have looked up for the hatchment to see what noble of princely corpse lay within. But there was no hatchment hung outside the wall of the Palace Zavieski, even while the dead body of the Princess Zavieski lay within, for the princess had no place in the English peerage.

Passing through those gloomy portals into the house, the stranger visitor might naturally have expected to find the bare floors and walls and the severely simple furniture of some public reformatory or asylum, and would be delightfully amazed by the richness of the scene upon which he would enter.

The forbidding portals led into a vast hall, which was a perfect wonder of decorative art. The floor was a rich mosaic of rarest marbles. The walls were lined with paintings of greatest beauty and highest cost. Two mantelpieces of gray marble were triumphs of the sculptor's skill. Statues of world-wide fame stood here and there where the light from the lofty roof fell on them most effectually. Vases, cornices, even chairs and tables, were all marvels of the carver's art.

Carved oaken doors on either side opened into sumptuous suites of rooms on the same floor.

A grand staircase led up to the splendid rooms above.

In one room only of this palace lies our present business—in the grand saloon on the first floor. The furniture and decorations have all been changed since the death of the princess. The rich Gobelin tapestry, carpets, curtains, draperies, mirrors, and so forth, and so forth, the wonder and admiration of the town, have all been taken down or covered, and the vast apartment presents now only a sumptuous funeral scene. The window shutters are closed, and

the room is lighted by a large, splendid chandelier of wax candles that hang from the center of the ceiling, a forest of little flames—a constellation of stars.

By its light you may behold the magnificence of gloom.

The veiling of the saloon is covered with black, fluted silk; the walls are hung with black cloth; the windows are curtained with heavy black velvet, sweeping down from the ceiling and dropping in massive folds to the floor. Chairs, sofas, stands, and tables are covered with black velvet.

In the center of the saloon, directly under the light of the chandelier, stands a sumptuous catafalco, also covered with black velvet, and canopied with black crape, and crowned with black plumes.

On the stand, under the canopy, rests a casket of ebony, inland with pearl and silver, and lined with satin and swan's down and lace. On the lid of this coffin, on a plate of silver, in letters of pearl, is this inscription:

MARIA,
PRINCESS ZAVIESKI,
Born September 20th, 17—,
Died September 20th, 18—,
Aged 95 years.

Within that coffin, dressed splendidly in white velvet, trimmed with white satin and white lace, adorned with pearls and diamonds and decorated with flowers, lay the mortal remains of the departed woman—a little, shriveled form and wizened face from which all beauty as well as all vitality had long departed.

Standing near the catafalco were two men—the medical attendant of the late princess, a court physician of great fame, Sir Peter Power, and her solicitor, Mr. Anthony Poinsett.

Though they were the nearest—friends, I was about to say, but the princess had no friends—acquaintances of the deceased woman, they had no words of commendation for her.

"Has Miss Smith been heard from?" inquired Sir Peter.

"No. She was notified as soon as the death occurred, on the day before yestrday; but she has not responded in any

manner. I fancy she is on her road hither," answered Mr. Poinsett.

"Was she notified by telegraph or by letter?"

"By letter. The little German hamlet where she keeps her school is out of the line of the telegraph wires, and I believe has not more than two mails a week."

"Ah! Of course, that accounts for it. She would not wait to write, but has set off at once to come hither."

"The death was so sudden that there was not the slightest chance of notifying her before it took place," said the attorney, not as if he were informing the doctor, who ,of course, knew more of that matter than himself, but rather as if he were complaining of the fact.

"Yes, it was very sudden. I dined with her highness on Tuesday night, and was called here on Wednesday morning to find her dead of apoplexy. What is the age of her heiress —Miss Smith?"

"Well, not far from forty years, I should think," replied Mr. Poinsett.

"What sort of a woman is she?" inquired Sir Peter.

"Have you never see nher?"

"Never. The princess never happened to be ill enough to send for me during any one of Miss Smith's visits— though, as I have heard, she made long and frequent calls on her aged relative."

"No, Sir Peter, it was not exactly so. Miss Smith keeps a French and English *pensionnat,* or boarding-school for girls, in the little hamlet of Osnik, and can only get away during the school vacations. She has been in the habit of coming here at the Christmas, Easter, and midsummer holidays. She was here as usual last midsummer, and stayed until the first of September, and left just twenty days before the sudden death of the princess. "

"Is it not strange that the late princess should have chosen to live here in this great house, with her vast revenues, alone, and allowed her only living relative to toil for her bread in a foreign land?" inquired the physician.

"Yes, it is strange, but it is in perfect keepng with the character of the late princess. I have been her solicitor for the last forty years, and I never knew her to give away a dollar in charity, or to do one single kindly act."

"That is a hard character to give to the deceased, standing here by her body."

"It is a true one! Why, Sir Peter, if she could have taken all her wealth down into the grave with her dust she would have done it rather than that any human being should have had it! Why, look at these jewels that bedeck her corpse by her written instructions—pearls and diamonds worth many thousand pounds!—they go down into the grave with her body! If she had made no will, Miss Mary Smith, as her only living relative, would have been her heir-at-law. But she chose to make a will, leaving all her property to Mary Smith, not from any affection for the girl, but because she would rather leave it to one of her own blood—since she must leave it to somebody—than to a stranger; but she loaded her bequest with a cruel condition —you may have heard it—that the legatee should not marry; and if she should marry, then the whole estate should lapse from her to one Cosmo Belle Isle, a distant relative of her late husband—Prince Alexander Zavieski."

"Cosmo Belle Isle? Is he a connection of the ducal house of Grand Manors?"

"Yes—a nephew of the present duke, whose younger brother, Lord Bertram Belle Isle, married Vera Zavieski, a niece of the late Prince Alexander. But he will never come in for this property."

"Why will he not?"

"Because Miss Smith will accept the conditions upon which she is to get the estate. She will remain unmarried."

"How do you know that?"

"Because if she did not marry in her early youth, she is not the least likely to do so now."

"I inquired of you a while ago what sort of looking woman this lady is," said Sir Peter.

"Oh, she is a lovely brunette—a most beautiful woman," answered the solicitor warmly.

"What, now at forty years of age?"

"Yes, now at forty years of age! I don't know how she manages to be so, but I know she is so."

"The wonder is all the greater that she has not been persuaded by some fine fellow to forego her splendid pros-

pects of wealth and position in favor of love and matrimony," said the physician.

"Yes, it is, and no doubt she has had her good offers of marriage—could not help having had them with all her beauty; but as I remarked before, having resisted such temptations in her youth, she is not apt to yield to them in her middle age."

"Persuade her to try and set aside the will! It is a sufficiently eccentric one to warrant a suspicion of the testator's unsoundness of mind. And if she can set aside the will, she will inherit as next of kin and heiress-at-law, with the liberty of marrying if she wishes."

"Your proposal is worth thinking of, Sir Peter, and I will suggest it to Miss Smith. Come now, shall we leave this gloomy splendor? You only wished to view the arrangements, I believe," said Mr. Poinsett.

"That's all! I have had enough of it," replied Sir Peter.

And the two gentlemen went out, the solicitor locking the door after them.

A footman, already in deep mourning for his late mistress, met them in the hall, and addressing the solicitor, said:

"If you please, sir, Miss Smith has just arrived and she asks to see you."

"Ah! at last! Where is Miss Smith?"

"In the blue parlor, sir."

"Ah! You will excuse me, Sir Peter," said the solicitor to the physician.

"Certainly, Mr. Poinsett. I am just going, in fact. Good-morning," replied the latter.

"Will you not stop to luncheon, and see Miss Smith?"

"No; thanks. I have an engagement, and just time to meet it. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, then, since you must go."

The two gentlemen parted; the knighted physician to enter his carriage and drive away to the house of some aristocratic patient, and the solicitor to follow the footman to the presence of the heiress.

The servant opened a door at the rear of the hall on the right hand, and admitted the attorney into a small but elegant apartment, upholstered in pale-blue velvet on ivory,

and having its one bay window hung with pale-blue velvet and fine white lace.

In the midst of this dainty room stood the stately form of a woman, dressed in the deepest mourning. Her long, black veil of heavy crape was thrown behind her, revealing a beautiful face, whose marble whiteness bore a "ghastly contrast" to the large eyes and luxuriant hair, both as black as night.

"Midnight and snow—but beautiful as a statue of Juno!" murmured the lawyer to himself as he approached the lady.

"Miss Smith, I am glad to see you. You got my letter, of course?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Nay, I did not. The first intimation I received of my aunt's death was from the obituary notice in the *Times*," replied the lady, in a voice shaken by emotion.

"Sit down, my dear lady. You are really unable to stand," said the lawyer, leading her to the nearest chair.

She sank into it, trembling, as she continued:

"As soon as I saw the notice of the death I set out at once for London, and have just arrived."

"Strange you did not get my letter; but these continental mails are very badly managed."

"Yes, in such remote places as Osnik."

"We waited to hear from you, Miss Smith, before fixing the day for the funeral."

"What day have you thought of?"

"Wednesday, the eighth day from the death—the fourth from this."

"That will suit me."

"It is the usual interval."

"The obituary said: 'Suddenly, of apoplexy.' Did she suffer much?"

"Not any, I should think, Miss Smith. She rang for her maid at seven o'clock in the morning on Wednesday. The woman found her in her usual health. She asked for a cup of tea. The woman went and brought it. She drank the tea with apparent enjoyment, and then lay down again and died immediately."

"Terrible!" exclaimed the lady, shuddering.

"I think not. It was a sudden and perfectly painless

death. Her physician was called and he came promptly, but could do no good, of course, for all was over. I was notified and wrote to you immediately. You can see Sir Peter Power and question him."

"Yes, I should like to do so; but not now. I must go to my room."

The attorney rang the bell and sent the footman who answered it to fetch the housekeeper, who, when she came, conducted the lady to the sumptuous suite of apartments that had been prepared for her.

"Well," muttered the lawyer to himself, when he was left alone, "how utterly she is overcome by this event! Who would have imagined that the poor, hard-working schoolmistress, coming into this vast fortune by the death of an antediluvian relative who had never shown her the slightest affection, should have been so prostrated by grief as Miss Smith appears to be! Truly, the ways of woman are wonderful and past finding out."

The lawyer would have thought so indeed could he have seen the new heiress a few minutes after the housekeeper had left her alone in her sumptuous bedchamber.

Locking her door and throwing off her mantle and hat, Miss Smith gave herself up to a storm of passion. Walking up and down the softly-carpeted floor, wringing her hands and beating her breast, she cried, at intervals:

"Was ever temptation—was ever cruelty and crime like mine!"

Four days later the funeral of the late Princess Maria Zavieski was solemnized with great pomp.

After the return of the household from the cemetery the will was read, which left the whole vast estate to the testator's grandniece, Mary Smith, on the sole condition of her remaining unmarried during the life of the testator, and, failing that condition, to the nephew by marriage, Cosmo Belle Isle.

"I thought that the condition of inheritance was that the heiress should remain unmarried forever," said the doctor, after the reading had been finished.

"So did I," replied the solicitor in a low voice, "but I did not draw up the will, and in fact never read it or heard it read until to-day. My father and predecessor prepared it,

and it came into my possession sealed, among other documents relating to the Zavieski estate."

"And Miss Smith may now marry, if she pleases."

"Yes, Sir Peter. There is a chance for you. I am already married."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PERPLEXED COMMUNITY

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
'Twixt night and morn upon the horizon's verge,
How little do we know that which we are!
How less what we may be! The eternal surge
Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves
Of empires heave but like some passing waves.
—Byron.

Isoline Irvine lay ill at Castle Belle Isle. She was prostrated by a nervous fever, superinduced by the mental suffering consequent upon the terrible fate of her mother.

The well-meant course of treatment practiced upon the young orphan by the kind-hearted duchess had only modified but not prevented the severe physical effects of Isoline's great affliction.

The poor girl lay now exhausted by mental and bodily suffering, and carefully tended by Dr. Ellis and Nurse Possett.

It was during the first hours of her illness that a slight clue to the motives and movements of the unfortunate Berry Irvine was brought to the castle.

In the afternoon of the first day Mrs. Pond, the housekeeper and cook at Stony Fells, came to Belle Isle, sent her "respectful duty" to the Duchess of Grand Manors, and begged to see her grace.

Her request was granted, and she was shown into a boudoir where the noble lady of Belle Isle graciously received her.

With a profound courtesy Mrs. Pond advanced and laid

a little white note upon the table before the duchess, saying:

"I found this, your mighty grace, behind the dressing-table in my lady's bedroom when I was a-giving of it a good cleaning. I think—if I might take the liberty, your highness—as the paper must have been laid on the top of the dressing-table for my young lady to see, but as it got blown behind, and slipped down the back outen sight. I don't know else how it could 'a' got there."

The duchess took the note, unfolded it, and read:

"BEDROOM, 4 A. M., Saturday.

"MY DARLING ISOLINE: Do not be alarmed when you miss me in the morning, as I am going to walk to Castle Belle Isle to see the duchess upon a point connected with your engagement as a music mistress for her daughters—and important point which I had not thought of at the time the engagement was made, but which has since that disturbed my mind so much that it has kept me awake all night. I feel that I must get it settled this day, if you are to go to the castle on Monday. Do not be anxious even though I should not return to-night. I may feel too much fatigued to do so; in which case come to church on Sunday and meet me, and I will return with you. Heaven bless and keep you, my darling child, is ever the prayer of your mother."

"This settles it. This explains everything! The poor lady, in the morbid and unsound state of mind which we all noticed, remembered some trifling condition or another that had not been considered between us, and attaching undue importance to it, set out in the darkness before day to come to Castle Belle Isle, and in crossing that unguarded bridge, missed her footing, fell into the dike and was swept off to sea," said the duchess, with a deep sigh, as she dropped the note upon her lap and leaned her head upon her hand.

"Indeed, then, with my respectful duty to your honorable grace, which I hope your worshipful honor might not think it were too great a liberty if I was to ask how my dear

young lady is at this present time," humbly suggested Mrs. Pond.

"Miss Irvine is very much prostrated, I am sorry to say."

"Would your worshipful highness allow a faithful old servant to see her?"

"I regret to refuse you; but your young lady must be kept very quiet. None but the doctor and the nurse can be permitted to see her," kindly explained the duchess.

"Then I won't even wish to 'sturve her, but will take my humble leave of your majesty," said the good woman, rising.

"Stay, Mrs. Pond. I wish you to tell me who have you at Stony Fells to take care of the house, since the catastrophe?" inquired the duchess.

"No one, your worship, except me and my girl, Lona, your honor."

"Then I will send one of our steady old men over there to guard you until some arrangement can be made."

"Lord love your grace's glory, there ain't nothing to guard agin'! But how and ever, if your highness wants to send a man to stop at Stony Fells, come he must, though how he'll live there passes me to know!"

"I will not send anyone, since it is not necessary to do so," replied the duchess.

"Has your majesty any more gracious commands, then?" inquired the woman.

"No; no more, Mrs. Pond, thanks."

"Then I'll make so bold as to take my humble leave of your highness," said the visitor, who, having exhausted every high title upon the great lady, courtesied down to the floor and turned to depart.

The duchess touched the bell, and to the servant who answered it she gave the order:

"Show Mrs. Pond to the housekeeper's room, and let her have some refreshments before she leaves the castle."

The woman courtesied again, even more profoundly than before, and followed her conductor from the room.

The duchess, when left alone, took up the poor lady's letter and read it over once more. Then laid it carefully away in the drawer of a little cabinet that stood at her right hand, saying within herself:

"This letter is very important and must be preserved; for although it certainly betrays a morbid state of mind in the writer, as setting to much value upon trifles and utterly ignoring the risk she was about to run in leaving home at the hour she did to cross the bridge over Demondike, yet it certainly affords conclusive evidence that no suicide could have been meditated or committed, and that her death was due to accident. Yes, this letter will be an invaluable witness for the poor lady, should her body ever be found to be subjected to an inquest."

So meditating, the duchess left the boudoir to sit an hour by the bedside of her suffering young guest.

At this very time a singular conference was being held in the Ruined Tower, between Old Nan and Young Nan, over their dinner of ham and eggs and claret wine—as fine claret as could be found in the cellars of the hall or the castle—but, then, it had never paid any duty.

"Yes! two hunder pound a-going a-begging for the want of a bold stroke to win it. Two hunder pound as would help us away from this demon's den to some decent place where we could live at ease all the rest of our lives," said Old Nan viciously.

"I don't see how you can say that, mother! The two hundred pounds, I take it, is at this moment safe in the vaults of some bank, and cannot be got at by the boldest stroke, unless the duke will give a check for it, and he won't do that until the body is found," replied Young Nan.

"And why ain't the body found, with such a reward a-waiting for it, I should like to know?" sharply demanded the old woman.

The young one had just put half a fried egg in her handsome mouth, and waited to swallow it and wash it down with a draught of claret before she answered.

" 'Cause the sea haven't throwed it up yet," said Young Nan.

"And never will," muttered Old Nan.

"I'm sure our men have been neglecting everything else under the light of the sun and moon to watch and wait for that body in the hopes of earning that reward, and haven't succeeded."

"And never will! I say again. They don't go the right way about it."

"I don't know what you mean, mother."

"I s'pose you don't, being a natural fool! Look here, Nan," said the old woman, lowering her voice and gazing intently into the eyes of he rdaughter.

"Well, I'm looking, and listening, too!" exclaimed the latter, after she had bolted a lump of bacom and gulped a draught of claret.

"No, you're not looking and listening—you're guzzling and gormandizing, that is what you're a-doing, you glutton and winebibber you!" wrathfully exclaimed Old Nan, shaking her fist at her daughter.

"Mother, I am attending to you. See me," said the young woman, as she pushed away her plate, wiped her mouth, and gave her undivided attention to the beldam.

"Well, then, this is what I want to know: if Dennis Prout and his pal cannot find the body, why don't they get a body? There!" exclaimed Old Nan, her eyes snapping with cunning.

"Mother!" cried Young Nan, in genuine dismay.

"Eh, 'mother!' What do you mean by speaking in that tone?" snapped Old Nan.

"I am afraid to think what you mean," muttered the young woman.

"That is because you are a fool and a coward! A fool because you can't understand that that body will never be washed ashore now, or if it should, it would never be known from any other woman's corpse, allowing it was of the same length. And that being so, how good a job it would be to get hold of some other body and give it up to the perlice and get the reward. Eh, it would be a good deed all around! It would quiet and satisfy the heart of the poor, suffering orphan daughter to think that the body of her dear mother was resting quietly in the grave with a handsome monimint at the head of it, instead of being tossed about on the stormy sea or being food for fishes! You're a fool not to understand this, and a coward to be afeared to ventur it."

In proof of which last assertion Young Nan shuddered.

"Looky here! It is easy as easy! They could get a bod——"

"Don't, mother, don't!" cried Young Nan, placing her hands on her ears.

At this moment Red Dennis entered the tower.

"Eh, you've not earned that two hunder pound yet!" cried Old Nan, snapping her finger and thumb derisively at the newcomer.

"No, I have not," answered Dennis gruffly, throwing himself into a chair.

"Going to give up the search?"

"Yes, I am."

"Glad to hear you say so. You'll never get the body; but you might get a body and win your two hunder pounds all the same, and I'd help you to do it to earn my share."

"Eh? What? What in the bottomless pit do you mean, woman?" demanded the startled ruffian.

"Listen and I'll tell ye. That idiot has stopped her ears. She won't listen to me. But she wouldn't betray us if she should hear. Attend, now! You and your pals may be the bone and sinew of our band, but, by George, I am the brains!" exclaimed the woman.

And then to the attentive Dennis she unfolded the details of the diabolical plot to which Young Nan had refused to listen.

"It would be easy enough to get—one—somewhere along this coast, or on the other side—but—they are generally identified by the clothes, or the marks on the clothes," suggested Red Dennis.

"And what's to hinder that?" leered Old Nan.

"Why, because if I got—one—from the other place—it—would not have on the right sort of clothes to be identified."

"He! he! he! I said I was the brains of the band! Do you get it, and I'll get its clothes, all marked and water-sogged and battered as if they had been beaten about in the ocean for days and nights. I'll get the clothes and have 'em ready for it."

"Mrs. Crook, you are a wonder! But might I ask how you'll get 'em?"

"Bah! Can't you see? Stony Fells is guarded by two

women. I'll go there and tell their fortunes. They like to hear me do it. They will offer me beer and drink it with me. I will drug their drink, and while they sleep I will go quietly through the house and take all that is necessary—and no more—lest it should be missed, and leave everything else as I found it."

"But won't they suspect you, when they wake up and find you gone?"

"No, for I shall not be gone. I shall stay until they are about to wake up. Then I will pretend to be very sound asleep, and they shall have a great deal of trouble in rousing me. Perhaps I may be very angry, and accuse them of making me drunk. I must think about that!"

"But if they see you depart, how will you manage to carry the suit of clothes?"

"Easily. They shall see me leave the house empty-handed, straightforward and aboveboard, like an honest woman, and then I will walk on a few rods to where the road turns into the lane, and there I will pick up the bundle from where I shall have hidden it before, and bring it here in triumph to put it in soak in the salt sea water, and pound it well besides."

"Yes, I see," said Red Dennis meditatively.

"And if you will do your part equally as well, we will earn that money."

"Yes—but—suppose, after we have done that, the real body should turn up?"

"Suppose you don't raise any more difficulties. What if the real one does turn up? That will be nothing to you. You find a body. They, the friends of Mrs. Irvine, identify it by size and clothing, and so forth! If it is afterward found that they have made a mistake it is their business, not yours! You only found a body. They identified it! You can't be blamed. Only I would advise you to make off with your share of the reward as soon as you get it. And now be off with you and begin to work this job!"

Red Dennis laughed and left the tower.

Nan herself lost no time. It was now only about one o'clock in the afternoon; for Nan, like other people of her class, took her dinner at twelve noon.

Now she arose, and, leaving her daughter to wash the

dishes, she went to the corner cupboard where she kept her medicinal dried herbs, roots, and flowers and her infusions, decoctions, and distillations, and she carefully selected a vial containing a powerful narcotic of the class which is swift in its action and brief in its duration, and put it into her pocket.

She slipped a pack of cards in the same depository and put on her short red cloak and her blue silk head handkerchief, and took her staff in her hand and turned to leave the house.

"Where are you going, mother?" inquired Young Nan, who had not once spoken during the interview between Old Nan and Red Dennis.

"I am going down to Stony Fells to see them there two lonesome women and tell their fortunes, as I promised them I would some day," replied the crone.

"Mother! You are going on a most wicked errand to get something to help out a most fiendish deception!" cried Young Nan.

"Hold your tongue, or I'll brain you, you jade! How dare you say such things? I am going to do a pious deed! I'm going to set a poor young gal's heart at ease by helping to find the body of her drowned mother and resky it from the stormy waves so she can give it Christian burial, with a monimint at the head, and a stone at the foot, and come and weep over it on Easters and All Souls' days. And likewise to put money in our pockets so we can go away from this smugglers' hole and live quiet lives summars! And you want to hinder me in such a holy duty as that, you wicked woman, you!" exclaimed Old Nan, shaking her staff at her daughter as she left the ruined tower.

She walked down to the coast, and took her way to the promontory. As the tide was low and still ebbing, she walked along the sands, keeping a sharp lookout for the dreadful "treasure trove" she was earnestly hoping to find.

"For if it should turn up," she said to herself, "it would save me all this trouble, and I should get the whole of the money."

And many a time in the course of her walk she went to the edge of the surf to poke over a piece of suspicious-

looking driftwood or a rift of seaweed, in hope of discovering "something."

In this way she was nearly two hours in reaching Stony Fells, which stood on the extreme edge of the promontory overhanging the sea. The end of the promontory shelved out like the ledge of a pulpit, and was therefore unapproachable from the water side.

Old Nan turned from the coast and climbed up the cliffs by a winding path and presently stood upon the plateau facing the grim old stone mansion.

Everything around the building was silent, and it seemed deserted.

CHAPTER XX

VISIONS

The enchantress now begins her spells.
—THOMAS MOORE.

OLD NAN opened the iron gate in the stone wall and crossed the rocky yard with its wild growth of briars and thistles, and went around to the servant's door at the back of the house and knocked.

The door was opened by Lona Pond, a fair-complexioned, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed and yellow-haired lassie, who uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure at seeing the old woman, for was she not the grandmother of handsome Ham Gow?

"Law! Is it you, Mrs. Crook? Surely I'm glad as glad to see you!"

"Yes, dearie, it's me! Didn't I promise you, when I met you in the village t'other day, as I'd come and tell your fortune first time I was passing this way?" asked the cunning old woman in a wheedling tone.

"Surely you did, Mrs. Crook. And I think it is so good of you to remember and call! Come in—do!" said the girl, leading the way to the vast old kitchen, which had the one recommendation of cleanliness. Bare stone walls, bare oak floor, tall, deep windows, a wide fireplace, with

a dresser on one side and a settle on the other; a rude oak table and a few rough oak chairs.

Such was the aspect of this old kitchen.

Lona, with a look of great slyness and satisfaction upon her pretty face, drew a chair to the fire and made the visitor sit down.

"Where is Mrs. Pond?" inquired Nan, as she dropped heavily into the seat and stood her staff up in the chimney corner.

"Oh, she's gone to the castle with some sort of a note as we found behind the bureau when we was a-cleaning up the missus' room, which she thinks may throw some light on the missus' fate."

"Ay, ay! What was in the note?" inquired Old Nan, her cunning blue eyes gleaming.

"Dunno. We didn't dare to read it, though it wasn't sealed. It were only in one of these here hang wollops."

"When did she go?"

" 'Bout an hour ago."

"When will she be back?"

"Oh, not till evening. She wants to call at the Hall and at the rectory and at the village."

"Oh, yes, she'll have to talk of her discovery to all her acquaintances, I suppose. Well, I am rale sorry she's away," said Old Nan, hypocritically.

"I'm not!" exclaimed Lona, very sincerely, as her eyes laughed with sly humor.

"Why ain't you?" demanded the crone.

" 'Cause I want to have my fortune told, and she's down on fortune telling."

"Oh, she is, is she? Why didn't she say so, then, when I promised to call the first time I come round this way and tell your fortune?"

" 'Cause she was afread of you, I reckon! But soon as ever you was gone she fell aboard of me, so she did, and said as if she ever caught me at such foolery how she'd lock me up on bread and water for a week!"

"Oh, she would, would she? And what does she think your missus would say to losing of your services all that time? Your missus was alive then, you know."

"Oh, yes! My poor missus! I dunno what she thought.

I reckon she threatened me without thinking, she was so mad, you know. Anyways, I'm glad she's gone. Now I'll have my fortune told in peace. And oh, it isn't my fortune, but—but——"

The girl hesitated and blushed.

"But a bonny lad's as hev gone to sea," suggested the crone.

Lona hung her head in silence.

"Ah!" said Old Nan to herself. "I need not drug her, even if I could get a chance. There is a safer and a surer way of putting her to sleep. Ay! and of learning something from her at the same time. These large-eyed, light-eyed girls are mostly clairvoyant, and if I could mesmerize this one into a trance I might get all I want to get, and hear all I want to know. I'll try my art upon her. If I succeed I will send her in search of the lost body. She'll be sure to find it, or to see it, even if it is at the bottom of the sea—especially if I can get hold of anything that body wore in life! And then, maybe, we needn't hunt a bogus one."

"Will you tell my fortune now, Mrs. Crook, please?" said Lona.

"Yes, my dear child. And I will do better than that. I will put you into a sleep in which you shall see your own fortune. How would you like that?"

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" exclaimed the girl, whose hopeful nature never imagined the possibility of seeing anything unpleasant in the future of her life.

"Sit in that chair, then, lean back, and fix your eyes on mine," said the crone.

The girl complied with these directions, and the crone was about to begin her passes when Lona interrupted her:

"Will I see—see—see——"

"Him? Yes, dearie. You will see him exactly where he is and what he is doing."

"Oh, that will be wonderful, wonderful! You may begin at once. But stop! It won't take long, will it?"

"To put you to sleep? No."

"I don't mean that. I mean I sha'n't sleep long—shall I? Not so long as people sleep when they take laudanum for the toothache and sleep all night and all day?"

"Oh, no! You will not sleep more than an hour."

"I'm glad of that, because I have got a task to finish before she comes home."

"Oh, you have? Then I will wake you up in an hour."

"That is a good soul! Now begin."

And the girl sat back in her chair and yielded herself up to the will of this necromancer, otherwise mesmerist, who immediately began her incantations or "passes."

The girl soon succumbed to the influences and went off into a deep mesmeric sleep or trance.

"Now, then," said the crone, "I must fasten up the doors to prevent interruption, and go through the house to get what I want."

She secured the lower part of the house and then went upstairs and roamed from room to room until she came to one which, from its superior furniture, she decided must be that of the late mistress.

Then she drew a large bunch of skeleton keys from her pocket and went to the bureau drawers and tried one key after the other until she found one to fit the lock, when she opened the drawers in succession and took from them only what she needed for her purpose and nothing else, for she did not wish a robbery to appear and cause inquiry.

Among the trifles taken from the drawer was an inside handkerchief or tucker of white linen cambric and lace which had evidently been used since it had been washed.

This she lifted delicately with the tip of her fingers and laid apart, muttering:

"It lay next to her bosom It is full of her magnetism. It will be useful in the clairvoyant search, but I must not let it be mixed with other material."

She closed the bureau drawers and locked them and went to a wardrobe and took from its hooks and shelves a full suit of woman's clothing, including shoes and stockings. These she made into a bundle and set upon a chair, while she carefully closed and locked the doors.

Then she replaced the bunch of skeleton keys in her pocket, took up the bundle in one hand and the "tucker" in the other, holding the latter by the tip of her finger and thumb, and so descended the stairs and passed by a rear door into the kitchen.

The entranced girl sat there in the chair, motionless as the dead.

The necromancer dropped the magnetic handkerchief upon her lap, and muttering:

"I shall be ready for you directly, dearie," went and opened the kitchen door and looked out.

There was no one to be seen in any direction. She did not really expect that there would be; but she was determined to be satisfied upon that point before issuing forth with her bundle, as she presently did.

She walked rapidly down the narrow, winding path that led through a wild growth of thorns to the beach below, until she got about a third of the way down, where, in a small, deep hole on the left side of the path, overgrown with briars and thistles, she put her bundle, which, being black on the outside, was completely hidden by the bushes above.

Then she rapidly retraced her steps to the house, re-entered the kitchen and fastened the door behind her. The entranced girl had not stirred.

The crone sat down on a chair, muttering:

"I must compose myself before I can do anything with her. Troubled waters reflect nothing."

So saying, she sat back and began making a few slow passes down her own head, face, and bosom.

After about ten minutes she drew her chair up before the profoundly entranced girl, who showed no sign of life, much less of consciousness.

The crone took both the rigid hands of the sleeper and said:

"Lona."

"Yes," responded the sleeper, as an expression of fear passed into her face.

"Where are you?"

"In the dark."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Look and see."

"It hurts me. I'm afraid. I cannot."

"Look, I command you! Where are you?"

A convulsive shudder passed over the sleeper, and she exclaimed:

"Oh! I'm afraid of falling! I am on the bridge! It is so dark! The torrent roars so! Oh!"

The crone made several passes over the girl's head, face, and bosom, and said:

"Be quiet. Tell me what you see."

The girl trembled into stillness and answered calmly:

"A woman—walking on the bridge before me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Old Nan. "What woman is it?"

"I don't know. It is so dark."

"Look again," said Old Nan, taking the neck handkerchief from the lap of the girl and folding it and tying it around the sleeper's forehead.

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl. "It is my mistress! She is at the end of the bridge now! She is looking down into the dike! She is doing something to the side of her dress—— Ah! It is torn! She is pinning it over, so the rent may not be seen. There! Now she has thrown her hat over the bridge! And now—now—what is she doing? She is taking another soft felt hat from her traveling-bag and is putting it on her head and wrapping a veil around it! And now—— She is gone. All is very dark again—pitch dark," said the girl, with a deep sigh, as she sank into the quietude of utter exhaustion.

"That is queer, too! Very queer!" muttered Old Nan to herself. "There was a shred of a torn dress, and there was a battered and sodden hat found in the dike, just below the place where Red Dennis saw Mrs. Irvine walking—and now this girl in her trance sees the same woman do something to her dress and afterward pin up the rent to hide it; then drop her hat over the brink, and afterwards take another hat, with a veil, from her traveling-bag and put it on! This looks very like a deep deception, and very unlike finding the body! I must let my seeress rest a little and then send her off sight-seeing again."

After a few minutes the crone placed her hands upon the handkerchief that was still bound around the girl's brow, and after holding them theer a few seconds, inquired:

"Where are you?"

"In a railway carriage—a first-class one, with cushions and curtains and looking-glasses. The sun is shining in at one window, making a fiery patch on the red curtain of the opposite one. We are going through a lovely green wooded country. We are rushing on rapidly! Oh, so rapidly! It almost takes my breath away! I am tired. Oh, so tired!" sighed the girl.

"Who is with you in the railway carriage?"

"A lady—only a lady. I am tired."

"Who is the lady?"

"I don't know. Her veil is down—stay. She draws a handkerchief from her traveling-bag and pours something on it, and raises her veil to smell it. I see her face now. She is my mistress. Her face is pale. Her eyes are red. She has been crying. Oh, I cannot see any more. I am tired to death! Tired—to——" And the girl's voice died away in a deep sigh.

"This grows stranger and stranger," muttered the crone to herself. "I must let her rest and try her again."

"After fifteen minutes, Old Nan resumed her incantations and her questions.

"Where are you now?" she inquired, pressing her hand upon the handkerchief that bound the brow of the clairvoyant.

"Oh, in such a grand, grand house! Grander than the castle itself! I see my mistress plainly now! Oh, she is so splendidly dressed! But all in deep black! Not a scrap of white about her—black silk trained dress, trimmed over so deep with black crape, and black bugles, and jet; but she herself is as white as a corpse, and her beautiful black eyes are heavy with shadows. There are ladies and gentlemen with her, all in black. The ladies have their bonnets on, like they were paying a visit. My mistress has her head bare, like she was at home. Oh, what a splendid room they are all in! What a grand house! But I am so dead tired, and it is all tumbling—tumbling—tum——"

Again the girl's voice quivered into silence, and her head sank upon her bosom.

"This beats all!" exclaimed Old Nan. "I will have to think all this over before I can make anything of it."

She let her subject rest for about ten minutes, and then

began her "passes" and her questions again, but she could elicit nothing but sighs, moans, and complaints of weariness from the exhausted girl.

"I would like to wait until she rallies and question her again, but I must not stay here much longer," concluded Old Nan, as she glanced at the kitchen clock and saw it was nearly five, and at the kitchen window and saw that the sun was near its setting.

With a few rapid counterpasses she roused the girl from her trance.

Lona looked around in a bewildered way.

"Well, don't you remember what has happened to you?" demanded Old Nan.

Lona stared at the questioner, but made no reply.

"Don't you know I came here to tell your fortune and put you into a sleep where you could see your lover in a dream?"

"Oh!"

"Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him in a dream?"

"No!"

"Oh! You stupid! Yes, you did! And you talked in your sleep and told me all about where he was! Why, it was my Ham, you shy puss, and me not knowing as who was his sweetheart until you saw him in your dream and talked about him in your sleep!"

"Oh!" said Lona again, for she was both bewildered and exhausted.

"Ah! You saw him in a fine ship, on the blue sea, writing a letter to you to be sent home by the first homeward-bound craft they should meet! And you don't remember nothing about this?"

"No!"

"Don't remember anything you dreamed about?"

"No!"

"Nor anything you talked about in your sleep?"

"No!"

"How stupid and provoking! but, then, people do often forget their dreams!"

"Won't you please—tell me—what I talked about in my sleep?" inquired the girl, slowly recovering her faculties.

"Lots and lots about my Ham Gow! My Ham. I will tell you sometime if you will come to the tower. You really did see him in your dream. You saw where he was and what he was doing this very hour. And I will tell you all about it when you come to the tower."

"Why can't you now?"

"Too late! Look at the clock! Mrs. Pond will be at home in a few minutes."

"Oh! so she will! Oh, yes! You must go at once, Mrs. Crook; but won't you take a glass of beer first?" inquired Lona, remembering hospitality in the midst of prudence.

"No; she might catch me at it; and although she could not hurt me, she might punish you. Good-by, my lass. The first time you come to the tower I will tell you all you told me about your sweetheart," said Old Nan, as she opened the door and left the kitchen.

"What a bother it is not to remember one's dreams, 'specially when they are both pleasant and true! Oh, dear me! What makes me feel so weak and tired?" complained Lona, throwing herself back in her chair.

In the meantime Old Nan walked rapidly down the zig-zag path leading to the sands below.

At one-third of the distance down she stooped to the hole where she had left her bundle and recovered it. Then she resumed her walk, muttering to herself as she went on:

"Well, I sent my clairvoyant in search of the body, and she found it—but not as I expected she would. She found it just on the bridge—alive. That I did expect. But she didn't see it fall over the bridge and sink into the dike. No; everything was swallowed up in darkness; and the next time she saw it, it was still alive, and in a railway carriage. That I did not expect. And again the vision was lost in clouds. The third time she saw it, it was still alive, and more alive than ever, in a splendid dress, in a mag-nif-i-cent palace, receiving grand company. Ah! that was strange. That don't look like being drowned! That looks like some deception. And if there is a deception it is for some purpose. Steady, now, Nan, and your fortune's

made! First, to get the reward for finding the body—or a body—which must be found. And then to find out where that mag-nif-i-cent palace is standing where my splendid lady received her grand company. Where——"

In the preoccupation of her mind, Nan Crook did not look where she was treading, and so she had her mental soliloquy broken by a stumble and a fall. With as many oaths as might have served a pirate in a storm, she struggled to her feet. In doing so, her eyes fell upon something that looked like a pocketbook lying on the briars on the left side of the path.

She stooped and picked it up.

It was a memorandum book, bound in dark purple morocco, and having on its little brass plate the initials "M. S."

Nan knew the alphabet, but that was the extent of her knowledge of letters.

" 'M. S.,' " she said to herself. "What does that stand for, I wonder."

She opened the book and saw that its pages were written all over. She was filled with curiosity to know the meaning of the writing.

"This book must have belonged to her. She must have dropped it on her way to the bridge. I wonder if this will give any clue to that palace? If it does—if it does, Old Nan will have an annual income outen my lady for keeping of her secret."

So saying, the crone hurried onward, walking rapidly until she reached the ruined tower.

Young Nan was out, but Red Dennis was there awaiting her return.

"Well?" she demanded eagerly. "What news?"

"Good news! Listen! That poor girl, Nell Thorne, died a Monday and was buried yesterday," replied the man.

"Well?"

"The grave is in a lonesome part of St. Luke's graveyard."

"Yes!"

"It isn't watched."

"No?"

"No!"
"What then?"
"I think—we shall get the reward."

CHAPTER XXI

FOUND

A FEW days after the events recorded in our last chapter, the Duke of Grand Manors sat alone in his library, looking over the morning papers.

He was reading this item of personal intelligence in the London *Independent:*

"The will of the lately deceased Maria, Princess Zavieski, is in perfect accordance with the supreme selfishness of a woman who, in the whole course of her long natural life, had never been known to give even so much as a farthing in charity, to do one deed of mercy or to speak one word of kindness to any human being. Her vast fortune, made by successful speculation in stocks, and estimated at ten millions of pounds sterling, has been left entirely to her one sole relative, Miss Mary Smith, or Osnik, Germany, on the sole condition that the inheritrix should remain unmarried. Failing this condition, it is to descend to Lieut. the Honorable Cosmo Belle Isle, nephew by his mother's side to the deceased husband of the late princess and also nephew by his father's side to the present Duke of Grand Manors. No legacy has been left to friend, servant, or charity."

"If this maiden lady could have been persuaded to marry, now a fine fortune would have come to our Cosmo," said the duke. "What a monster of selfishness that woman must have been, to have ignored all the claims of suffering humanity, and all the impulses of natural affection, to make such a will as this," he added.

He had scarcely said this to himself, when a discreet knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Mr.

Overly, his grace's steward, who bowed profoundly, and stood at what the drill sergeants call—attention.

"Ah, Overly, what is it?" said the duke.

"If you please, your grace, there is a coast guardsman below, who came to me half an hour ago with the news that the body of a woman had been found last night washed ashore near the mouth of Demondike, and supposed to be that of the missing lady, Mrs. Berners Irvine," said Overly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the duke, instantly and earnestly interested. "Where is the man?"

"If you please, your grace, he is below. He came to me first, not presuming to come near your grace; but I took the liberty to think your grace might like to question him yourself. So I brought him to the castle. He is a most respectable man in his station, your grace—Dennis Prout, of the Preventive Service," said the steward.

"Bring him up," said the duke.

The steward bowed himself out and in ten minutes returned, ushering into the presence of the duke a short, thick-set, broad-shouldered, bull-necked, bullet-headed, red-bearded ruffian, whom we know as Red Dennis, the traitor and smuggler, and thief and body snatcher, but whom the unsuspecting steward presented to the duke of Grand Manors as::

"Mr. Dennis Prout, of the Preventive Force, your grace."

"Ah! I am glad to see you, Mr. Prout, especially if you have brought news and proof of the recovery of the remains of the unfortunate lady who was drowned last week at Demondike," said the duke.

"I found a body, your grace; but I cannot say if it is that of the missing lady. That will be for her friends to decide; but if your grace will permit me, I will tell you the circumstances," said the coast guardsman respectfully.

"Certainly; I am anxious to hear all you have to tell," replied the duke.

"Then, your grace, last night, between sunset and twelve o'clock, it was my watch on the coast, near Demondike. About half-past eleven o'clock, at low tide, I was walking a little west of the dike, when I noticed something lying upon the sands pretty well wound about with sea weeds. Something in the lay of the thing proved to my mind that

it was not a piece of driftwood. I went to it and found it was the body of a woman, with black hair and clothed in black clothing. This made me think of the description of the missing lady. So when I got over the shock I raised the body in my arms and carried it beyond the water line, for fear of its being carried away again by the tide, and left it there and went back to my beat and kept it until I was relieved."

"Did you tell your relief of the discovery you had made?" inquired the duke.

"No, your grace. 'Self-preservation is the first law of nature,' so it is said, and I wanted all the reward of finding the body to myself," said the coast guardsman, with an air of candor.

"Ah! selfish, but natural!" observed the duke. "Go on."

"Well, your grace, I loitered until my relief had got out of sight at the extreme end of the beat, and then I went and raised the body in my arms and carried it to the nearest place of shelter."

"Where was that?"

"The Ruined Tower, your grace. I beg your grace's pardon for doing so, but there was no other place near."

"Is the body still there?"

"Yes, your grace, it is; but——"

"Is it in a good state of preservation?"

"Oh, no, your grace. The—the—the—fishes, your grace."

"Ah! yes, yes. Have you given information at police headquarters?"

"No, your grace. As your grace seemed to be the next friend of the deceased lady, and as your grace had offered the reward for the recovery of the remains, I thought it my duty to give your grace the first information. I hope your grace approves?"

"It is perhaps as well," said the duke, as he rang the hand-bell that stood upon the table beside him.

A page who waited in the hall outside within hearing of its sound entered the room.

"Go down and order the carriage to be at the door in twenty minutes," said the duke.

The lad touched his short-cropped, red head and went upon his errand.

"Mr. Prout, I thank you for your zeal. If the body you have found should prove to be that of the lost lady, you will receive the stipulated reward," said the duke, rising with the air of dismissing his visitor.

"I humbly thank your grace," said the coast guardsman, bowing profoundly, and continuing to bow until he disappeared through the door, followed by the steward.

When he was left alone the duke reclined back in his chair and subsided into thought.

"The coroner must be notified at once. The inquest must be held to-day. The witnesses must be summoned to view the body—to identify or deny it—as the remains of Mrs. Berners Irvine. Let me see—who should be summoned? Those who know her intimately, of course. Those are—the duchess, myself, the rector, her own daughter, and the servants from Stony Fells. These are the persons who knew her most intimately. The duchess must not be summoned. I will not permit her to be subjected to such annoyance. Miss Irvine is physically disabled from attendance. There remains, besides myself—Dr. Vincent, Dr. Ellis, and the servants from Stony Fells. They must be summoned at once."

As the duke came to these conclusions the page entered and announced the carriage.

"Tell the duchess that I have gone to Hawkeville, but will be home in time for dinner," was the message left with Cosmo Belle Isle, whom the duke encountered on his way to the carriage.

The young man bowed and smiled, without any suspicion of the ghastly errand that took his uncle to the village.

The duke passed on and entered his coach.

"Drive to the Ruined Tower at the foot of Demondike," was the order he gave to his coachman as he took his seat in the carriage, which immediately turned down the avenue leading to the ferry.

After crossing the ferry to the main, the duke perceived that the coast was "alive" with fishermen, agricultural laborers, loiterers, men, women, and children, discussing the news that had already, in some unknown way, got abroad concerning the finding of the drowned body.

The duke ordered his coachman to drive fast along the

beach, and in something less than an hour he arrived at the Ruined Tower.

The house—if it could be called such—was surrounded by a mob of people whom the two police officers stationed there on duty found it difficult to keep in order.

Way was made, however, for the duke's carriage, which drew up before the rude door of the strong room.

A policeman on guard there came forward and opened the carriage door.

"What is going on in there?" inquired the duke.

"The crowner's 'quest, your grace," replied the man, respectfully touching his hat.

"What! already?"

Before the policeman could answer, Old Nan, who had heard the short colloquy from within, pushed through the crowd that filled the strong room, and came out, saying:

"It was no fault of ours, your majesty! Mr. Prout he said as your highness was to be told of it first of all, so that you could have the first sight of it, because your highness had offered the reward, but the news got wind somehow, and the first thing I knowed Mr. Prout hadn't been gone an hour before here comes down the crowner with two policemen and a whole possy come-at-us after him. I hope your imminence won't blame us."

"Not at all, my good woman! Let me pass in, if you please," said the duke, slightly smiling at the woman's volubility.

"Sartainly, your royal highness. Stand aside, there, you ruffians, and let his majesty come in!" exclaimed Old Nan, walking before the duke, and emphasizing her words by clearing the way with elbows, fists, and feet, sorely at the expense of her neighbors' stomachs, ribs, and shins.

In a cleared space, in the middle of the room, lay the body of the drowned woman, on a deal table covered with a white sheet. The body itself—except the disfigured face—was not covered, but lay stretched out there on its back, the dripping and closely clinging black dress and long, wet, black hair making a strongly marked contrast to the whiteness of the linen on which it lay. Some tender hand had spread a white pocket handkerchief over the horrors of the poor face, whose lost features were supposed to have

been the prey of fishes, and were therefore totally unrecognizable, even by the nearest friends.

The coroner was seated at a little wooden stand at the head of the table, around which the jury were standing—the resources of the Ruined Tower not affording seats for twelve "good men and true."

A flag-bottomed chair was, however, dragged from some obscure corner by Old Nan and placed at the stand beside the coroner for his "imminence," which was the last title of distinction bestowed by the crone on the Duke of Grand Manors.

The inquest had already made some progress.

Old Nan, it seemed, had testified to the bringing of the body to the Ruined Tower at just past midnight by Mr. Dennis Prout of the Preventive Service.

Mr. Dennis Prout was not in the room, not yet having returned from his mission to Belle Isle Castle—it takes longer to walk that distance than to drive it—but his testimony could be taken later. The proceedings were not to be delayed on his account, for while waiting for him other witnesses could be heard.

Mrs. Pond, the housekeeper and cook from Stony Fells, was undergoing an examination at the time the duke took his seat beside the coroner.

Amid hysterical sobs and tears the woman swore most positively that this body upon which the inquest was being held was that of her "dear, dear, dear, deceased mistress, Mrs. Berners Irvine."

When asked how she could so assuredly identify it, she declared, with grief and indignation, that "that was her mistress' black cashmere dress, and that was her Balmoral skirt, and that her Welsh flannel petticoat, and those were her mistress' Balmoral boots and Balbriggan stockings"—indicating the various articles by touch as she spoke of them.

Being gently reminded that the identification of the clothing, though it was strong presumptive evidence, was not exactly identification of the body, she suddenly caught up the poor, damp, mutilated left hand and exclaimed, amidst convulsive sobs:

"Here, then, is her wedding ring on her third finger of

her left hand! Will the coroner's honor's glory have the condescension to let me take it off and pass it up to him?"

The coroner assented and the woman tried to slip off the ring, but in vain; it fitted too tightly. She desisted, with a burst of tears.

"I think the ring should be forced off and examined. It might furnish conclusive evidence, one way or another," whispered the duke to the coroner.

The latter nodded, and in his turn beckoned a policeman, to whom he gave an order.

In a few seconds the ring was forced from the finger of the dead and brought to the coroner.

He took it in his hand, applied a small magnifying glass to the inscription within, and read:

"Arthur Berners and Mary Irvine, 18—."

"There seems to be no doubt that this is the wedding ring of the late Mrs. Berners Irvine," said the coroner, passing the ring to the duke.

"I know it to be so," replied his grace, after examining it closely.

The woman on the stand was then asked if there were any other means by which she could identify the body as that of her mistress.

"Yes, there is! By her beautiful black hair! I have combed it out often enough for her to know it from other people's hair," replied Mrs. Pond.

Being asked if the duties of a lady's maid were a part of her functions as housekeeper and cook, she answered:

"My mistress kept but two servants—me and my gal—and I was always willing to turn my hand to anything to accommodate her, for she was a good mistress to me."

Mrs. Pond was allowed to sit down, and Leonora Pond, late housemaid at Stony Fells, was called to testify.

Lona Pond was, if possible, even more nervous and hysterical than her relative had been; but she was also equally positive that this was the body of her late mistress. She identified and swore to everything that Mrs. Pond had identified and sworn to, and she added that she should have known this to be the body of her late mistress "anyway," by its size and shape and general appearance, even changed as it was by being in the water so long.

She was allowed to stand down and was carried off, in a paroxysm of hysterics, by several women.

Dr. Vincent, rector of Hawkeville parish, was called and testified that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, the remains before them were those of his friend and parishioner, Mrs. Berners Irvine.

"Would your grace mind taking the witness stand?" deferentially inquired the coorner.

"Certainly not. Is it not my bounden duty?" inquired the duke, somewhat disgusted at the toadyism of the public officer.

The duke formed very decided opinions upon most subjects. He was very seldom in doubt. He was not in doubt now. He was absolutely convinced in his own mind that the body under inquest was that of his late friend, Mrs. Berners Irvine, and he swore to its being so without a moment's hesitation.

At this point of time a stir was seen in the crowd near the door, and Dennis Prout entered the room.

He was considered the most important witness in the case, and was immediately put upon the stand, and examined by the coroner in person.

In answer to the direct questions put he testified to having seen the deceased lady walking on the bridge over Demondike at about three o'clock in the morning of the day upon which she was missing. Later on he testified to having discovered the body now under inquest on the preceding night at low tide on the part of the beach just west of the mouth of Demondike, and to having lifted it in his arms and brought it to the Ruined Tower, and left it in the care of Mrs. Crook, while he went to Castel Belle Isle to give information to his grace the Duke of Grand Manors of what had taken place.

After Dennis Prout came John Traverse, the steward of the Hawkewood estate, who testified to the finding of the fragment of a black dress, with a pocket attached, and a pocket handkerchief within it; also a black felt hat, halfway down the bank of the Demondike.

The stone mason, who was with him at the time, corroborated his testimony.

The articles in question were now called for in evidence,

and were brought forward by the police officer who had them in charge.

The fragment of the dress, the pocket handkerchief, and the felt hat were identified by the steward and the stone mason as the relics found by them halfway down the bank of Demondike.

The pocket handkerchief and the hat were identified by the two Pond women as the property of their late mistress.

The fragment of dress was then compared with the dress on the drowned woman, and it seemed to match in color and texture, and also to correspond with a great rent on the right-hand side of the dress, where the pocket should have been, but was not.

The edges of the fragment having the pocket, and the edges of the torn dress where the pocket was missing, did not fit each other, however; but this accident was easily accounted for from the fact that the rent had been torn so much larger by the beating of the waves among which the poor body had been tossed so long.

A few more witnesses were examined, and then the jury, after a very short deliberation, returned a verdict to the effect that:

"The deceased, Mrs. Berners Irvine, came to her death by falling from the bridge over Demondike, on the morn-in gof September 20th and being thereby, then and there, drowned."

The Duke of Grand Manors then asked leave to take charge of the body for burial, which was, of course, promptly granted him.

The crowd in and around the Ruined Tower then slowly dispersed.

The duke then beckoned Dennis Prout to his presence.

"You will call on my steward to-morrow morning, who will give you a check for the amount of the reward you have won," said his grace.

Dennis Prout bowed down to the ground in the excess of his gratitude and humility.

"I shall send an undertaker here, who will assume charge

of these remains and take them to Stony Fells, from which they must be buried," continued the duke.

Dennis bowed down to the ground again.

Then the duke entered the carriage and drove away.

Dennis Prout and Old Nan looked at each other and laughed.

"What a clincher that there wedding ring turned out to be! Wasn't it lucky I found it in the pocket of that there memorandum book!" chirped Old Nan exultingly.

"Yes, it was, Mrs. Crook, but how in the world came it to be there? Ladies don't carry their wedding rings in their poketbooks, do they?" inquired Dennis.

"No, they don't! Not as I ever heard on! Mrs. Irvine must have took off hers and put it in that book before she lost it out of her possession."

"In course, I s'pose she did. But what did she take it offen her finger for, that's the question?"

"Ay, that is the question! And some other things about that lady is questions, too!" exclaimed Old Nan.

"What do you mean?" demonded Dennis.

"Nothin'. But say! Weren't it clever in me to tear out the pocket of that black gownd, and rip and rend it and soak and mash it, the way I did?"

"Yes, Mrs. Crook. Where is Young Nan?"

"She run away to the village, as you know, as soon as the inquest began."

"And hasn't got back?"

"No! Never mind Nan! Tell me, now! Are you going to divide that there money equal between me and you, share and share alike, as the lawyers say?" cunningly demanded Old Nan.

"Why—as to that, Mrs. Crook, you know I furnished the body."

"Ay, that you did," assented the crone, with a sly twinkle in her eyes.

"And I have the credit of finding it."

"So you have."

"And of honestly winning the reward."

"True, my son."

"I think I should have three-quarters of the whole amount, and that one quarter should satisfy you."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, now, listen: What good would that 'subject,' as the doctors call 'em, have done you if I hadn't found and fixed up the clothing to prove whose it was, and the wedding ring to be a clincher? Come now! Divide fair! If you don't, so help me Satan, I'll blow on you, Dennis Prout, for a thief, a smuggler, a body snatcher and a grave robber! Yes, and a murderer! After I have proved all the other crimes on you it will be easy enough to charge you with the murder of—you know whom!" said the crone, with a malicious leer.

The effect of these words on the man was startling. He reeled back until he reached the walls of the room, where he leaned with trembling form, pallid face, staring eyes and drooping jaw.

"You—would—do—that! You she-demon!" he at length exclaimed, glaring at her.

"Yes, sonny, I would do that! I would turn queen's evidence and hang you, and enjoy doing it, too, if you should go for to cheat me out of my well-earned half of the reward! Why, I done more than half of the work! And I was the first to think of the job, too, you sneak! Come, hows'ever, I give you a few hours to think better on it, as I had rather have my money than my revenge, as I dessey you would rather part with half the reward that is my due than with your life or your liberty! I'm not a bit afeared, my son, but what you'll do me justice!" added the crone, with a chuckle.

What he would have done to her then and there can never be known, as the sudden entrance of Young Nan put an end to the interview, and Red Dennis, with a fierce oath, snatched up his hat and rushed out of the strong room. Three days after this the body supposed to be that of the unfortunate Berry Irvine was quietly interred in the graveyard of Hawkeville church.

Her unhappy daughter was too ill to attend the funeral, or even to be informed of the finding of the body.

All information upon that head was reserved from Isoline Irvine until she should recover health.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EARL AND COUNTESS AT HOME.

When the bereaved daughter of Berry Irvine was sufficiently convalescent to hear the subject discussed, the good duchess went to her chamber, seated herself by her side and gently informed her of all that had happened during her illness—suppressing only one hideous item, the mutilated and disfigured condition in which the "remains" had been found.

The young girl wept freely as she listened; but her tears were natural and healthful, and upon the whole, it was comforting rather than otherwise to think that since her beloved mother had met so sudden and unprepared a death by accidental drowning, her remains had been recovered and now reposed peacefully beneath the turf in the village churchyard, where her orphan might often visit her grave.

Only one complaint Isoline made—that the funeral had taken place without her having had the sorrowful privilege of gazing once more, and for the last time, on the bodily features of her beloved mother.

But the duchess tenderly reminded Isoline of the impracticability that had existed of delaying the burial under the circumstances.

Isoline humbly assented to this explanation and became quiet, if not resigned.

Under the care of the good duchess and her daughters, Isoline gradually regained her health and strength.

On the first day that she was able to go, she begged permission to visit the grave of her mother, and Lady Volante drove her thither in her ladyship's own little pony carriage.

Hawkeville Old Church, as it was called, was an ancient Gothic edifice in the form of a cross, having no steeple, but a heavy square tower, covered, like all the rest of the building, with a thick green mantle of ivy.

The churchyard was full of monuments clustering like a grove around the church, and behind the churchyard was a comparatively new cemetery, which was entered through an iron gate in the old stone wall.

Crowded as the original yard was with graves, room had been found in a green spot under a broad, spreading oak tree for the coffin of "the unfortunate Berry Irvine."

Lady Volante drew up at the front gate, gave the reins to her groom, who followed on horseback, assisted Isoline to alight, and led her into the churchyard and down a narrow, shrub-bordered path to the deeply shaded, verdant nook, where, under the sheltering branches of the old oak tree, arose the slender, white marble obelisk that had been placed there by the duke to mark the last bed of Isoline's mother.

It bore a very simple inscription, as follows:

MARY,
Widow of the late Rev. Berners Irvine.
Died September 20th, 18—,
Aged —.

Isoline sank down on the newly sodded mound and gave way to the inevitable burst of sorrow.

Lady Volante stood over her, full of sympathy, but without attempting a word of useless condolement.

When her paroxysm of grief had temporarily exhausted itself, Isoline arose, drew a deep breath, wiped her wet eyes and gazed upon the obelisk with its inscription.

"Who put this here?" she at length inquired gently.

"Papa," replied Lady Volante softly.

"Oh, how kind, how good, how thoughtful he is! How grateful I ought to be to him and all his family for their great benefits to me! and how grateful to the Lord for raising up such friends to me in my trouble!" fervently exclaimed Isoline.

"I am quite sure it has been a pleasure to dear papa and to us all to do what we could to alleviate your sorrows, dear girl," said Lady Volante tenderly.

"I do believe it is, for you all live to do good. But it is time for me to rouse myself from this weakness of selfish sorrow and do my duty also in this life. Volante, dearest, on Monday next I must begin my work."

"No, my dear Isoline, mamma does not wish to do so

yet a while. There is something I have to tell you—a secret, dear."

"I think I can guess that. I know Lord Hawkewood has not been coming here only to talk political economy with the duke. But we will not touch on that happy topic in this sad place. It might not be well omened to do so," said Isoline with a sigh.

Lady Volante, whose only motive in referring to her "secret" was the wish to divert the sad thoughts of Isoline from dwelling on her bereavement, assented to the fitness of her friend's remarks by keeping silence on the subject.

A few moments later she said:

"Dear Isoline, I do not wish to hurry you, but the dew is falling, the place is very damp, and you are still very delicate and susceptible to cold since your illness. We had best go home now, love. We can come again, you know."

Isoline arose and took the offered arm of Lady Volante, and they left the churchyard together.

As they were driving home, Isoline sank again into somber thought.

To arouse her from this, Lady Volante said:

"As soon as you are able to enter into a discussion of business, my dear Isoline, papa wishes to talk to you about Stony Fells."

" 'Stony Fells!' " echoed Isoline, with an inquiring look.

"Yes, dear—as to what had best be done with it. You will make your home with us, you know."

"Oh, Lady Volante!" said Isoline deprecatingly.

"Did you not know that mamma had promised your mother, in the event of your being left alone, to take charge of you and keep you here?" inquired Lady Volante.

"No, indeed, I did not know it," replied Isoline.

"But it is true, however, for mamma told me so."

"I know my dear mother, for a short time before her fatal accident, had been haunted with a presentiment of sudden death from heart disease."

"And with that presentiment strong upon her, she confided her anxieties for you to mamma, and fell in with the arrangement proposed by the duchess, that in the event of your mother's death, you should make your home with us.

I hope you have no objection to obey your mother's will in this respect," said Lady Volante.

"I am but too blessed in having that privilege, but I never can be too grateful," replied Isoline.

"Then, when you are able to talk, dear, you can arrange with papa about Stony Fells."

"What about Stony Fells, dear Lady Volante?"

"Why—as you are to live with us, you will not need to keep up the establishment at Stony Fells."

"I see now! Of course I could not do it. How could I?" inquired Isoline, with a slight smile.

"Then papa thinks that the lease had best be given up, the furniture sold, and the servants discharged."

The ready tears sprang into the eyes of Isoline.

"I fear it will be painful for you to do this, my dear; but listen. Everybody is inclined to be kind. Lord Hawkewood is willing to take the house off your hands, though he will never get another tenant for the old place, I think. Of the furniture, you can select every family relic and memento of your mother that you wish to keep and bring them here."

"You are goodness itself, dear Volante! There are some things I would like to preserve."

"Bring them to the castle, then, my dear."

"Thanks, love! But, besides the relics I was thinking—I was thinking——"

"Of what, dear Isoline?"

"Of the two servants. They have been with us so long—the elder one from as long as I can remember. The young one from her childhood. They will be homeless, and, I fear—destitute."

"Not so. The establishment at Hawke Hall will have to be enlarged when I go home thither——"

Lady Volante paused, blushed vividly, and then with an effort overcame her embarrassment and smilingly continued:

"I think I can find places, with good wages, for both your faithful servants, dear Isoline.

"Ah, Lady Volante! You are the angel of the poor and sorrowful!" earnestly exclaimed Isoline.

"'Lady Volante!'" began the duke's daughter, with a merry laugh. "I never heard of an angel with a handle

to her name in the whole course of my long and useful and laborious existence! How many times have I implored you not to call me Lady Volante?"

"Dear Volante, then! Beloved Volante!" murmured Isoline.

"That is much better! Very much better! But here we are at the ferry!—Steady, Pearl! Steady, Beauty!"

This to the little silver-gray pony, who began to be frisky as she descended to the water side.

The groom came to the head of the horse, took the bit bridle and led her down the slope to the gangplank and then across to the ferryboat.

In twenty minutes more the boat had crossed the water and landed at Belle Isle.

The groom went again to the head of the pony and led her to the shore.

Then Lady Volante resumed the reins and drove along the shaded avenue that led to the castle.

They arrived in good time to dress for dinner.

The care of the kind duchess had, during the illness of Isoline, provided mourning and had it made up for the orphan girl.

This was the first occasion of her joining the family at dinner since her bereavement. When she appeared in the drawing-room, her beautiful pale face seemed still more beautifully fair in contrast with the darkness of her eyes and hair and the jet blackness of her lusterless silk dress and its heavy crape trimmings.

As she glided softly into the room, Cosmo Belle Isle, tall, fair, handsome, and attentive, went to meet her, and with every silent and delicate manifestation of reverential tenderness and sympathy led her to a seat.

Nor did his attention stop there. When dinner was announced he led her into the dining-room and placed himself beside her at the table.

And after dinner he devoted himself to her during the whole evening.

As she was still something of an invalid and this was her first evening out of her sick chamber, she was the first to retire from the circle.

Cosmo Belle Isle took her wax candle in its little gold

candlestick, gave her his arm and supported her up the grand staircase to the door of her own chamber.

There he placed the candle in her hand, and wishing her a balmy night's repose, and heavenly dreams, he left her and returned to the drawing-room below.

The Earl of Hawkewood, who, as the affianced husband of a daughter of the house, took the liberty of dropping down upon the family at any hour of the day or evening that suited his convenience, had just arrived, with the evident intention of taking a bed at the castle.

He was seated beside Lady Volante on one of the *tête-à-tête* sofas.

The duke was using his privilege as *paterfamilias* and prospective father-in-law by sitting back in his chair with his handkerchief over his face, dozing.

The duchess was seated alone at a table covered with pictures and *bijouterie*.

As Cosmo Belle Isle entered she beckoned him to come to her.

He came and took a seat at the same table, facing her, and took up a tortoise shell and gold paper knife, and began fiddling with it awkwardly. He seemed to know what was coming.

"Cosmo, Cosmo, take care! Take care, my boy!" whispered the duchess, raising her fair, fat forefinger and shaking it at him.

"I don't understand you, aunt," said the young man respectfully, while a sudden flush dyed his frank, fair brow crimson; for he did understand, the young story-teller, though he pretended not to.

"Cosmo, you are too poor to marry a poor girl, my boy! And too honorable, I am sure, to try to win her affections without any hope of marriage."

The young lieutenant fidgeted and looked unutterably confused.

"There, lad, there; I shall say no more on the subject. I do not wish to wound you, but only to warn you against thoughtless folly that, if indulged in, may—nay, must—bring trouble upon yourself and others. You will leave us in a few days, I know. In the meantime, be very careful,

my dear," concluded the duchess, as she took up a book of prints and began to examine them to show that the short conference was at an end.

The young gentleman, who seemed now to be possessed of a demon of restlessness and mischief-making, just sauntered up to the betrothed pair and interrupted their *tête-à-tête* by asking the Earl of Hawkewood when, as master of the Hawkeville fox hounds, he was going to have the first meet.

"What is that to you?" laughingly replied the earl. "You are generally supposed to ride to the hounds about as well as a tailor! But the first meet will be at the head of the Demondike, on Thusday, as you might have seen by the Hawkeville *Beacon*, if you really cared to know."

Cosmo Belle Isle turned on his heel and went and waked up his uncle to ask him when there would be a sitting of the county magistracy and whether anything more could be done toward the detection and arrest of the criminals who had perpetrated the outrages at Hawke Hall.

The duke, waked from some pleasant dream of his long past boyhood, perhaps, suppressed a yawn, rubbed his eyes, and said he thought it was near bedtime.

And the "goodly meeting" being thus broken up, the members of the circle retired to their several chambers.

After breakfast the next morning the Earl of Hawkewood left the castle, and the Duke of Grand Manors had a business interview with his "ward," as he chose to call and consider Isoline Irvine.

In that interview all the proposals of the duke were promptly accepted by the orphan, who had, indeed, no idea of opposing any arrangement recommended by those whose faithful protection of herself had given them a claim to her obedience.

In the course of the next week, therefore, in carrying out the plans of the duke for the benefit of his ward, the establishment at Stony Fells was broken up, the lease was resigned, the furniture—with the exception of the few trifles reserved by Isoline in memory of her mother—were sold at auction, and the two servants were discharged.

Furniture stores are not so many, nor auctions so frequent in the country as in the towns and villages, and

therefore, perhaps, it happened that the household goods from Stony Fells brought a fair price.

With the money she realized from the sale Isoline paid all her mother's outstanding debts, which were not many or large, and she also paid to the two servants board wages a quarter in advance, that they might be supported during the time they were waiting to take the promised service with the future Countess of Hawkewood.

Soon after this breaking up of the establishment at Stony Fells the duke made inquiries of the rector concerning the means by which the late Mrs. Berry Irvine had supported herself and daughter, and whether there had been anything left besides the household furniture which had already been sold.

The rector, however, could give no information on the subject.

Later on, the duke felt it to be his duty, delicate as the inquiry might be, but acting in the orphan's own interests, to consult Isoline on this point.

But Miss Irvine knew no more than did Dr. Vincent, or anyone else, of the source of her mother's income. She only knew that the income had been narrow and precarious, and that it had seemed to be received during those periodical absences of her mother when she always returned home with a little supply of funds.

After these affairs were settled, Isoline began to recover her usual good spirits, to take an active interest in the splendid preparations that were being made for the marriage of the eldest daughter of the house with the Earl of Hawkewood, and, ah, benign and happy influence of nature and of youth, to feel deep consolation in the tender sympathy of Cosmo Belle Isle, who became more and more devoted in his attentions to the beautiful orphan.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MOST BRILLIANT MATCH OF THE SEASON

In February the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors, with all their family, including the music mistress, went up to London and took possession of their town house, Belle Isle Palace, for the season.

Lady Volante Belle Isle began her second campaign as an engaged young lady.

The final preparations for her marriage were to be completed here; for the ceremony was to be performed at the most fashionable and aristocratic church in London—the world-renowned St. George's, Hanover Square.

The bridegroom-elect, the young Earl of Hawkewood, came up to town and took apartments at the Alexandra.

His own town house, Hawke Lodge, was then in the hands of upholsterers and decorators, undergoing a thorough refurnishing and refitting for the reception of the young pair upon their return from their bridal tour.

The new Earl of Hawkewood took his seat in the House of Lords for the first time on the opening of Parliament this month.

The Duke of Grand Manors introduced him; but the new peer took no more part in the debates than the chair on which he sat.

The duchess gave no parties, and attended no receptions. She was too much occupied in personally superintending the preparations of her daughter's wedding, and, apart from that, she was reserving herself for that important occasion.

Lady Volante Belle Isle was busy all day long driving from milliner to mantuamaker, and from dressmaker to jeweler.

The world of fashion decided that the forthcoming marriage, which had been duly announced in the *Court Journal*, would certainly be the most brilliant of the season.

The settlements were munificent—"most munificent," the solicitors of the duke had said among themselves, adding that the bridegroom expectant had acted with the su-

perb liberality of a prince of the blood-royal. Ten thousand pounds sterling per annum settled on the bride-elect for her separate use, really looked so.

Twelve young titled beauties were chosen as bridesmaids.

A German prince—there are so many, many German princes—the younger son of a reigning grand duke, whose domains were really almost as extensive and valuable as an average American farm, was to be "best man"—groomsman, as we call it.

An archbishop, an uncle of the bride, assisted by a pair of deans, was to perform the ceremony; Veri to furnish the breakfast; Massoloni, the music.

In short, all the arrangements for the solemnization of "the most brilliant match of the season" was to be on the most magnficent scale, with the most *recherché* accessories.

The important day—the day of days—arrived.

At St. George's, Hanover Square, a distinguished company filled the interior of the church.

A very miscellaneous crowd surrounded the exterior and lined the sidewalks up and down opposite the building.

A long line of coroneted carriages was drawn up in the street.

Every aspect of the square indicated the approach of "the most brilliant wedding of the season."

At Belle Isle Palace six carriages were in waiting—three for the twelve bridesmaids, one for the bride, her father, mother, and oldest brother, and the remaining two for the younger children, their governess, and their music mistress.

Within the innermost chamber of the house, the bride, arrayed in all her bridal glory, stood waiting the signal to go down.

Her wedding dress was a magnificent white velvet trained princess dress, trimmed with flounces of white marabout feathers, each fastened with an aigrette of pearls and diamonds. A superb cardinal point lace veil descended from her head, flowing down her shoulders and back nearly to the edge of her long train. A wreath of orange buds crowned her rich, dark-brown hair, and from this wreath tendrils of orange buds trailed far down the veil. A necklace and bracelets of pearls and diamonds encircled her

plump, creamy neck and arms. White kid gaiters and gloves, both embroidered with seed pearls, completed the essentials of this magnificent toilet. The handkerchief, fan, and bouquet were in perfect accordance with the rest.

Her bevy of fair bridesmaids stood around her—blue-eyed and golden-haired blondes, black-eyed and raven-haired brunettes, and the charming gray-eyed and brown-haired mezzotint beauties were all represented here. Their dress was a uniform consisting of trained princess white satin robes, with white Brussels veils and wreaths of white moss rosebuds.

"The carriages attend my lady," announced the groom of the chambers at the door.

And the lovely bride, followed by her fair train of bridesmaids, swept out of the room,

"In sheen of satin and shimmer of pearls,"

and descended the broad staircase.

In the hall below they were met by the Duke of Grand Manors and the Marquis of Belle Isle—the father and brother of the bride.

"Your mother is in the carriage, my love," said the duke, as he gave his daughter his arm and led her forth.

The Marquis of Belle Isle bowed and conducted the bridesmaids.

The children, with their governesses, were already seated in the rear carriages.

When all was ready the procession moved, and in due season reached the church and drew up before its massive portals.

Ushers in "wedding garments," with white wands in their white kid-gloved hands, kept clear the walk from the pavement to the church door. This walk was covered with scarlet cloth and canopied with an arch of flowers.

The bride's procession passed up that and into the church and up the middle aisle under a succession of floral arches, shedding forth brilliant beauty and exquisite fragrance, and between rows of pews filled with splendidly arrayed guests to the altar railings, behind which the chancel seemed one garden of rare and beautiful exotic plants and flowers.

Here the archbishop and his assistants—all in their episcopal robes and vestments—awaited the bride's party, which was here joined by the bridegroom and his friends.

The Earl of Hawkewood advanced from the right, took Lady Volante Belle Isle's hand from her father and led her to the altar, before which they both kneeled on the velvet hassocks that had been laid for them.

The bridesmaids formed in a circle behind them. The bride's parents and relatives stood on the left.

The archbishop opened the book and began the impressive marriage service, according to the ritual of the Church of England.

When the ceremony was concluded the bridal party passed out into the vestry to sign the register.

After which they received the congratulations of their friends and left the church.

Outside there was the usual change in the arrangement of the program.

The Earl of Hawkewood led his newly made countess to his own elegant carriage, while the fourth place in the duke's carriage, vacated by the bride, was filled by her next sister, Lady Victoria Belle Isle.

The bridal party, with many distinguished guests, repaired to Belle Isle Palace, where a sumptuous wedding breakfast awaited them.

There the usual speeches were made, toasts offered and jests ventured and enjoyed.

And when these in their turn were all exhausted, the guests arose from the table and the bride retired to her room to change her bridal for her traveling dress.

Her mother was by her side. The duchess had scarcely had an opportunity of speaking to her daughter since their return from the church. Now, in the midst of their conversation upon other topics, her grace suddenly inquired:

"Volante, my love, did you notice in the church a lady in deep mourning, heavily veiled, who sat alone in one of the side pews on the right hand of the altar?"

"No, mamma, dear; I do not think I noticed anyone among the crowd at all," responded the bride.

"Probably not; but if you had noticed anyone, I think you must have noticed that woman."

"Why, mamma?"

"Because of her strangeness altogether. She had that side pew against the wall all to herself in the crowded church. She sat with her back to the window. She never moved, and never took her eyes off Isoline Irvine."

"What was she like, mamma?"

"I cannot tell you—a tall, elegant woman, in deep mourning, who sat with her back to the light and her veil down, and never moved, and never took her eyes from Isoline Irvine. That is all I could see of her. When we left the church we left her there."

"Some unhappy widow, I do suppose, mamma," said the newly made Countess of Hawkewood, who now, seated in her dressing-chair, resigned herself into the hands of her new French maid, Mademoiselle Millefleurs, who began daintily to remove the bridal veil and wreath from the beautiful head of her lady.

The subject was then dismissed, and the duchess and her daughter talked of other matters.

This was no sad parting between the tenderly attached mother and child; for, after the short bridal tour should be over, the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood were to join the family of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors at Belle Isle Palace until their own home, Hawke Lodge, should be ready to receive them.

And whether in town or country, the mother and daughter were to reside near each other.

Mademoiselle Millefleurs was an artist in her profession, and she took her time in making her lady's traveling dress as perfect in its way as her bridal toilet had been.

The costume of the countess was now a silver-gray poplin suit, trimmed with chinchilla fur, and a chinchilla hat with short, curled, gray marabout feathers, gray veil, gray gloves, and gray parasol.

When the bride's second toilet was complete, and she was ready to go downstairs, she stopped to embrace her mother and take leave of her there. Then they both descended the stairs together.

All the wedding guests awaited the bride in the drawing-room, whither she went to make her last adieux.

Cordial congratulations, hearty good wishes were repeated there.

And, finally, the bride's brother, the Marquis of Belle Isle, led her out into the hall, where she bade adieu to her father and mother, and to all the younger members of the family who were assembled there to see her off.

Finally she gave her hand to her bridegroom, who drew it within his arm and led her to the carriage that waited to take them to the London Bridge Station, whence they were to go by the tidal express to Dover, where they intended to take the night steamer to Calais en route for Paris, where their honeymoon was to be spent.

As the bridal carriage rolled away from the door a shower of rice—which fashion has decreed shall take the place of the traditional and time-honored old slipper—was flung after them.

A few minutes later the wedding guests left Belle Isle Palace, and the house returned to its usual quiet routine.

March is not a pleasant month for travel in northern latitude, so the bridal pair went to Paris, took apartments at Les Trois Freres, and settled down there to spend their honeymoon, but not by any means in retirement.

They entered into all the gayeties of the fashionable world, where *la belle Anglaise*—as the young countess began to be called—became the furor of the drawing-rooms and the clubs.

At the end of the conventional four weeks the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood returned to London and became the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors at Belle Isle Palace.

It was now April, and the brilliant London season was near its height.

A drawing-room was to be held by the queen at Buckingham Palace.

The Duchess of Grand Manors waited for that occasion to present the Countess of Hawkewood, on her marriage, to the queen, as etiquette demanded, before giving or accepting any invitations in honor of the newly married pair.

She had not very long to wait.

Early in the month the queen held the first drawing-room of the season at Buckingham Palace.

Then the most beautiful bride of the season was duly presented by her mother to their sovereign.

There her beauty became the theme of every male tongue and the envy of some female minds.

This was the inauguration of a series of splendid social triumphs, such as have seldom been achieved by any one reigning beauty.

"If Victoria were only of an age to be brought out now! She is very like her sister, whose success would greatly facilitate her own advantageous settlement," said the duchess, referring to her second daughter, who was still in the schoolroom; but she consoled herself with thinking that on the next season the lovely Lady Victoria Belle Isle might begin to win laurels of her own.

The long and splendid season drew to a close near the end of June.

Then the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors and all their family returned to Castle Belle Isle.

The Earl and Countess of Hawkewood went for a short time to Scarborough, for the sea bathing, and afterwards, about the beginning of August, they made a visit to the duke and duchess at their castle.

Here a series of dinners and dancing parties were given in honor of the married pair.

Hawke Hall had been in the hands of architects, decorators, upholsterers, and landscape gardeners for the last few months, and was now so much renovated and improved that the old red manor house seemed transfigured into a white and shining fairy palace, the brickwork of the building having been covered with white marble slabs, and all the old casements and lattices transformed into modern French windows, bow and bay windows. All the decorations and furniture of the house had been renewed—the priceless old tapestry and pictures restored. Nothing that money, skill or taste could do toward making the place a perfect home had been omitted.

Yet the house was not quite ready for the reception of its new lord and lady until the first of September, when it was arranged that the noble pair should make a grand

public entrance into the Hall, in accordance with a long-established custom of the Earls of Hawkewood.

The most sumptuous preparations were made for this pageant, which was to come off at noon on the first day of September.

Strange and passing strange that no one remembered, or, if they did, no one mentioned the fact that this day was the anniversary of the murder of the late Earl of Hawkewood.

It is probable that the day was first suggested by the contractor for the work of renovation, who probably knew the time when that work would be completed, and without reflecting upon the fact that the first of September must henceforth be memorable as the date of a murder, had supposed that, being the initial day of the month, it would be the most appropriate for the public entrance of the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood upon their estate.

The young earl must have remembered the tragic anniversary, but probably had not the moral courage to oppose the arrangement, or to explain the grounds of his opposition, for

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

The youthful countess also remembered that terrible anniversary and shuddered at the thought that it should have been selected as the date of their home-going. But, she reflected, if other people who knew the facts saw nothing strange, ominous, or objectionable in the arrangement, it was not for her to criticise it.

Not a word, therefore, passed between the young pair on the subject. Indeed, since all necessary discussion of the late earl's tragic and mysterious death had ceased with the investigations that were fruitlessly made at the time, the whole subject had been studiously avoided.

The preparations to celebrate the home-coming of the young married pair were completed.

Triumphal arches stood all along the principal avenue leading from the lodge gates through the park up to the Hall.

Flags flew from the tops of all four of the towers that flanked the main building.

Tents were raised and tables were set throughout the grounds to accommodate and refresh the agricultural laborers and the tenantry, who were to be entertained that day in honor of their lord's and lady's arrival at home.

A music stand was erected at a convenient place; for the country and village lads and lasses were to be indulged in their favorite pastime.

There was to be no entertainment of the nobility and gentry on this occasion, however.

The festival was to be entirely a domestic and feudal one given to the dependents of the new earl in honor of his bride's home-coming.

Early on the morning of the first of September the laborers, villagers, and tenantry began to assemble and to look forward impatiently for the arrival of their hereditary lord and lady, which was to be the signal for the commencement of their music, dancing, eating, and drinking.

The three cronies, Proddy, the little, gray, old cobbler, Tree, the tall and swarthy tanner, and Penn, the little red-haired locksmith, were standing together under one of the grand arches, looking up the avenue for the approach of the carriage.

"Ah, sonnies!" said the old man. "It's all very brave and fine, and noa doobt the beef and beer will be of the best, and we'll all have full and plenty to enj'y ourselves; —but for all that, sonnies, it do mind us of this day last year which ended in the murder of the late young airl. Heigh-ho!"

"I wonder, I do," squeaked Penn, in a piping little voice, "why the noble quality should chose sich a day for the crowniation, anyhow."

"Look yer," said the cobbler—"yer not to kittercise the condict of the roy'l nobility. They know what they do—ay, they know, and it is not for niggerramusses like us to kittercise 'em."

"Of course, you are a comprehensive man, Mr. Proddy, and looked up to by us all; and no doubt you are right, but we must thenk our thoughts all the same," put in Tree, in behalf of Penn.

"'Tis said here and there that the roy'l pair will come in a coach drawn by eight white horses and sixteen out-

riders, followed by a long tail of gentlemen and ladies in coaches and on hossback. But I know not an it be true," ventured little Penn.

"Noa, it isn't true. I wunnot say about the hosses. They may be eight, or there mayn't be, nor likewise the mounted grooms, or outriders, as you call them, Mr. Penn! But there's no long tail of ladies and gentlemen. This show and this feast be got up for us—the faithful servants of the roy'l family of Hawkewood Hall! And none but the roy'l family conclusive of the dukkal family will take part in it," the old cobbler explained.

" 'Tis said here and there that the Duk' and Duchess of Grand Mothers will be in the procession," added Penn.

"Ay, they will, sonny; and no one else. Take my word for it."

"See here, Proddy!" exclaimel Mr. Moss, the head gardener, who was one of the marshals of the parade—"why don't you keep off the avenue? Don't you know the rules? All you tenentry and laboring folk are required to stand on each side of the avenue, ready to welcome my lord and lady as they drive; and there! see what a beautiful shade you will have under those alms!"

"Ay, Mr. Moss, we know the rules, but we thought as there'd be no harrum in just standing here and looking up the avenue to get the fust sight of the roy'l carriage," pleaded Proddy, as he obeyed the signal of the gardener and stepped off the avenue, under the shade of the oak trees that bordered it on each side, and where also many of his neighbors, in their holiday suits, stood waiting.

In fact, the whole course of the avenue was flanked on both sides by lines of gayly dressed men, women, and children, and presented a variegated and lovely mosaic in contrast to the deep-green foliage of the great oak trees that shaded them and darkened the drive.

" 'Tis said here and there that the roy'l percession will leave the castle at ten o'clock so as to be here by high noon. 'Tis nigh on to that now," observed Proddy, lifting his eyes through the thick foliage of the tree above him to get sight of the position of the sun.

"Well! and here they come! Listen!" exclaimed Tree, as a rising swell of voices from the crowd at the end of

the avenue nearest the park gate announced the approach of the bridal train.

Every hat was instantly doffed and every eye was turned down the drive in eager expectancy.

First came two mounted grooms—one in the black-and-red livery of Hawkewood, the other in the blue-and-white livery of Belle Isle. They rode in advance of the bridal train to clear the way, and, finding it clear, rode on toward the house.

"Now for the roy'l nobility," said Proddy to his mates.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE CORRIDOR.

THE carriages came in sight—the open barouche drawn by four cream-colored horses, and containing the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood, was in advance; the bridegroom wore the faultless morning dress of the period—dark-gray frock coat and pantaloons; dark-gray felt hat; lighter gray gloves and cravat. The bride wore a suit of silver-gray, brocaded silk, with a silver fox fur jacket and hat; gloves, veil, and parasol to match.

The earl and countess bowed and smiled, and continued to bow and smile, in response to the ringing hurrahs that greeted and followed them as they passed.

After them, in another open barouche drawn by a fine pair of black horses, came the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors, and the Marquis of Belle Isle, and the Lady Victoria Belle Isle.

The carriages passed up the avenue out of sight of the people, and halted before the grand entrance of the Hall, where the servants under the butler and housekeeper were drawn up in array to welcome their lord and lady, which they did in a much quieter way that the villagers and tenants had done, by respectful bows and deep courtesies, and universal smiles.

The housekeeper, a natty little dame in a rustling black

silk dress, and a stiff, white book muslin cap, came officoiusly forward to wait on her new lady.

"How do you do, Mrs. Curran?" kindly inquired the countess of the smiling and courtesying woman.

"In the best of health, thank you, my lady. And I need not fear for your ladyship's good health, you are that blooming, my lady. May I show your ladyship to your ladyship's rooms, my lady?" respectfully inquired the woman, with a deep courtesy, and a broad smile.

"No; attend to the duchess. I can find my apartments. Is Millefleurs there?" inquired the countess.

"Yes, my lady; she arrived with your ladyship's imperials some hours ago."

"Very well. Attend the duchess," said the countess, as she passed up the grand staircase, closely followed by the earl.

Her rooms opened from the upper hall, the doors being near the head of the stairs.

As they gained the landing the earl opened his arms and folded her to his bosom, saying, with some emotion:

"Let me welcome you home in this way, my wife, my dearest love, my Volante!"

She quietly received the embrace, rather than returned it, and then she said:

"Will you see that the duke is made comfortable?"

"Pelton has charge of his grace's comfort and has already shown him to his dressing-room."

"What is the program for the day? Will you please to tell me, for I do not think I understand it," said the countess, pausing on the threshold of her chamber door.

"Well, we are to have lunch, while the people outside are taking their refreshments—not but what they will eat and drink all day, for the tables on the grounds will be kept standing and supplied with relays of beef, bread, and ale, all the while," said the earl, with a laugh.

"And after the lunch?" inquired the countess.

"We must go out and mix with them a little. I shall have to dance with some of the women. I am not quite sure that you will not be expected to 'tread a measure' with some of the men," added the earl, with another laugh.

"Where is your dressing-room, Lewis?" inquired the countess, irrelevantly, but rather suggestively.

"Here, next yours, and I am going in now," answered the earl, taking the hint and passing into his apartment.

The countess entered her own chamber, where the French maid stood in the midst of an archipelago of trunks and an avalanche of finery.

"Oh, dear! why is not all this litter cleared away?" inquired the countess, looking around in despair of finding a vacant chair on which to seat herself.

"Eef you please, meeladee, I have been *travailant* all day with these toilets, with *deaux femmes des chambres* to asseest me," said the woman, apologetically, as she cleared the dressing-chairs before the toilet table, for her lady's accommodation.

"Come and take off my hat and jacket, and do my hair over," said the countess, as she seated herself before the glass.

"Weel you shange your dress, meeladee?" inquired the girl.

"No; not until evening. There, that is the lunch bell," said the countess, rising as soon as her hair had been arranged.

"This leetle tea rose on the right side, meeladee," suggested the maid, taking the creamy bloom from a bouquet on the table.

"Well, put it in. And try to have all this rubbish taken away before I come up here to dress for dinner," said the countess, as she again submitted her head to the artistic fingers of the French girl.

"I weel do so, meeladee," replied Mademoiselle Millefleurs, as she fixed the fragrant, creamy tea rose in dark-brown tendrils of her lady's hair and turned her own head aside to look at the effect with the eye of a connoisseur.

The countess then glanced at the mirror and turned and left the room to go down to lunch.

A very dainty repast was elegantly served in the room that was known as the cabinet parlor—an octagon room, with its eight sides alternately occupied by windows and full-length portraits, all surmounted with lambrequins of crimson satin and gold.

Only six persons sat down to lunch—the Duke and Duchess of Grand Manors, the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood, the Marquis of Belle Isle, and the Lady Victoria Belle Isle.

It was not the gay party that it should have been on the occasion of a bride's coming home.

The deep shadow of that awful tragedy which had been enacted in this very house only a year ago, and of which this very day was the first anniversary, darkened every mind and quieted every tongue. No one ventured to speak of it, though they could think of nothing else.

When lunch was over the whole party walked out into the park to witness, and some of them to take part in, the pastime of the villagers and country people.

It was a "gay and festive" scene. The white tents decorated with bright-colored flags, and the many tables covered with white cloths, made a pleasant contrast to the vivid green grass of the ground under foot and the heavy green foliage of the trees overhead, while the groups of gayly dressed men, women, and children gave variety to the general aspect.

Around the tables under the trees, or within the tents, the elders of the assembly were still gathered, eating and drinking; in the open spaces the young men and women were dancing to the music of the fiddle and the bagpipes.

The party from the house walked among them all, with kind words and smiles for everyone with whom they came in immediate contact.

The most threatening part of the program was not carried out, however. No woman insisted on her prerogative of waltzing with her young lord. No man had the audacity to claim his privilege on this occasion of dancing with the countess.

In fact, this old feudal custom, never in good taste in the oldest of times, was now falling into disuse.

The tenantry and laborers had certainly never been more liberally entertained than they were at the present time. In their hearty enjoyment of this fête they even forgot the tragedy whose memory overshadowed the first hours of the day, and ceased to allude to the dreadful fate of their late lord, found murdered in his bed on the morning succeed-

ing his birthnight ball, just one year ago, and ceased to draw evil prognostics from the fact that this fête in honor of the bride's home-coming should be held on this sad anniversary.

The people thought of nothing but enjoyment.

The Earl and Countess of Hawkewood and their party remained walking about among the merry-makers until sunset, when they reëntered the house to dress for dinner.

The tenantry and laborers outside continued to eat, drink, dance, and make love, according to their age, sex, and condition, until it was too dark to do anything but sit down and talk while waiting for the fireworks to begin.

As soon as the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood and their friends had risen from dinner and come out upon the front balcony over the principal entrance of the Hall, there came another shout of welcome from the crowd seated in the grounds outside.

Then the signal for the fireworks was given, and the first rocket went up, a flaming messenger, into the murky, black sky, lighting up all the clouds above and the park below, and drawing from the spectators exclamations of admiration and delight.

And if such was the effect of the first rocket what, what was that of its successors?

Every succeeding "flaming minister," whether rose, rocket, wheel, uriel or comet, was more startling, dazzling, and wonderful than its predecessor, and elicited wilder shouts of astonishment and rapture.

The exhibition lasted two hours, and was concluded by the throwing up of a blazing rocket that resolved itself into a magnificent meteor that shone like the sun at midday above the Hall, and contained in burning characters the monogram of the earl and countess surmounted by a coronet, and the whole encircled by a motto: "Happiness to All."

This was greeted by deafening acclamations of amazement and ecstasy by the multitude, who seemed as if they never could cease applauding.

But presently the young Earl of Hawkewood stood up in the balcony beneath that blazing, sunlike meteor, to speak to his people.

Then the turbulent multitude became as motionless as a sea in a calm.

The young lord began by thanking them for their presence there that day, and for all their warm expressions of affection and fidelity to himself and his countess, and by assuring them of his own and Lady Hawkewood's good will to themselves. He reminded them that, although he was said to have brought an alien name to the old historic title, yet he was as directly descended from the ancient Earls of Hawkewood as his late lamented cousin and predecessor had been. He bade them remember that his great-great-grandmother, the Lady Berenice Hawke, had been the eldest daughter of the thirteenth Earl of Hawkewood. Therefore that he was really no alien who had come among them, even though his name was Manton instead of Hawke. And that he should always love his people, as his ancestors at Hawkewood had done before him.

This speech was received with new acclamations and shouts of:

"Long live the noble Earl and Countess of Hawkewood!"

In the midst of the shouts the blazing meteor died out in darkness, and then the voices of the people subsided into silence, and they began to disperse through all the paths of the park leading more directly to their several homes.

The Earl and Countess of Hawkewood and their party withdrew into the house, and all being much fatigued, soon afterwards separated to their several apartments.

The wearied young countess sought her own room. It was at last cleared of its crowd of imperials and finery. Mademoiselle Millefleurs was in attendance with a soft dressing-gown of white cashmere lined with quilled white satin and trimmed with white swan's down, to replace the rich trained dress of ruby-colored velvet which the countess had worn at dinner.

As soon as the young Lady Hawkewood had exchanged her full dress for this easy wrapper, and had had her rich brown hair released from the chains and fetters of braids and jewels, she dismissed her maid, saying that she should not need any further attendance that night.

Mademoiselle left the room and Lady Hawkewood remained seated in the easy-chair, her thought magnetized to

the memory of that tragedy which had occurred just one year ago in this house and of which this day was the first anniversary.

She thought of that night-walk she had been led to take, and of how she had lost her way and strayed into the bachelors' corridor, and of the man she had seen there stealing away from the room in which the earl, a few hours later, was found murdered.

She had no doubt in her own mind that the man she had seen was the real murderer.

Should she know him again, she asked herself—should she know him again if she should meet him in the world?

She could not tell, even though now she seemed to see his form and face as she had dimly seen it then—the rich crimson silk dressing-gown reaching down to his heels, the black velvet fez cap with its long golden tassel; the white, spectral, horrified face, seen dimly in the moonlight that streamed through the oriel window at the end of the corridor and struck upon it.

The memory made her shudder and feel sick. She dreaded to stay alone. She wondered why the earl did not come to her room on this night of all nights, on which he had brought her home.

She wondered if he were in his smoking-den at the rear of this hall.

She would not ring for a servant at this late hour of the night, but she resolved to go and see for herself.

She arose and went out into the hall. The moon, which had just risen, was shining through a bow window in the rear.

Everything was still and silent, as all should be in a well-ordered household in the dead of night.

She passed down between rows of closed doors until she reached the archway of the passage leading to the smoking-room. She entered this and groped her way along to the rear, watching for some glimmer of light through crevice or keyhole.

She reached the door of the smoking-room and knocked.

No one answered.

She tried the handle of the lock, but it was fastened.

She stooped and looked through the keyhole; but all was dark within.

Evidently there was no one in the smoking-room.

She turned to retrace her steps to the hall, and just as she reached the archway she heard a door open. She passed through the archway into the hall, and there she saw, coming from a room on the same side, the figure of a man, in a long crimson dressing-gown and a black velvet cap with a drooping gold tassel, upon which the moonbeams of the oriel window fell.

She stood spellbound, horrified, breathless.

The man turned his head, the moonlight fell full upon his face, revealing all its features distinctly.

The young countess, her eyes dilating with amazement and extreme horror, gave one long, maddened stare, and then, with a piercing shriek, fell to the floor in a deep swoon.

She had seen again the man whom, one year ago this night, she had seen stealing from the room of the murdered earl, and now—now she recognized him for whom he was!

CHAPTER XXV

DRIVEN INTO DELIRIUM

THE hour, the place, the position, the picture, formed and presented a perfect counterpart of the scene Lady Volante Belle Isle had once before witnessed, in the darkness preceding the dawn, at the bedroom door in the bachelors' corridor, on the night of the late Earl of Hawkewood's mysterious death, now just twelve months ago.

The present scene seemed a sort of magical reproduction of that startling event, with this momentous addition —that instead of catching from the few feet distance an imperfect sight of the retreating figure on the scene of the tragedy, the amazed and maddened countess now stood for one tremendous minute, white face to face, scared eye to eye, with the skulking midnight murderer of the young earl, and then, recognizing the man, with a terrible shriek

that rang through the house, fell down in a deep swoon at his feet.

When Lady Volante opened her eyes again she was lying on the bed in her own chamber, with the duke and duchess, the earl, the village doctor, and the lady's maid anxiously grouped around her.

"Her ladyship will do very well now," whispered Dr. Ellis to Lord Hawkewood. "But what occasioned this deep swoon?"

"Heaven knows!" returned the earl, in the same low tone. "I met her half an hour ago in the passage leading to the smoking-room, and was about to speak to her, when she started, stared at me with an affrighted look and piercing scream, and fell to the floor."

"Took your lordship for a ghost, perhaps. But she is quite conscious now—I hope your ladyship is much better," said the doctor, turning to his patient.

The young countess started at the questioner without making any reply.

"How are you, dear love?" inquired the earl, pushing his way between the doctor and the duchess, and bending over his wife until the black velvet skull cap and gold tassel were within a few inches of her face.

A look of horror and detestation came into that face! She averted it quickly and put up both hands in deprecation.

"Will you not speak to me, dear love? What was it that frightened you?" persisted the earl, taking one of her hands.

She snatched it from him, while a violent shudder shook her frame as she turned herself toward the wall.

"Dear love, dear love, what is this?" persevered the earl, bending farther over her.

With a low cry of terror and abhorrence, she shrank and rolled away to the wall, and turned and buried her face in the pillows.

"Come away, my lord. Your presence disturbs her ladyship," whispered the doctor.

"But—good Heaven!—why?" demanded the earl, as he unwillingly withdrew from the bedside.

"Ah!" replied the doctor, with a smile. "One of the

problems that puzzles us medical men is this same 'why?' Or, in other words, how to account for the nervous fantasies of ladies in her ladyship's delicate situation. Better leave my lady with her grace for the present, my lord."

"It is all very strange and unaccountable to me," said the earl with a sigh, as he walked toward the other extremity of the room.

"It is not strange, though equally unaccountable to me," smiled the doctor, as he followed.

When the gentlemen had all withdrawn from the room, and the duchess and the lady's maid were left alone with the countess, her grace said to the girl:

"You may retire now, Millefleurs, but remain within call, in case I should want you."

When mademoiselle had closed the door behind her the duchess bent over her daughter, who was still lying with her face buried in the pillows at the back of the bed, and inquired tenderly:

"Volante, my child, can you talk to me?"

The young lady turned her head and revealed a face whitened and eyes dilated with horror.

"Volante!" said the duchess.

"Mamma!" gasped the daughter.

"Will you tell me what frightened you, my love?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Never! I will never, never tell!" wildly exclaimed the countess, her eyes beginning to blaze, and her pallid cheeks to redden with nervous excitement.

"But this is very strange, Volante! You are not superstitious. You do not imagine that you saw—saw—anything supernatural?" questioned the duchess, alluding to a rumor that had obtained among the common people that the ghost of the murdered earl haunted the bachelors' corridor.

The countess shuddered, but failed to reply.

"You did not fancy you saw the ghost, did you, Volante?"

"I will never, never tell!" repeated the countess, in a very excited manner.

"This passes belief!" exclaimed the duchess.

"Where is he?" suddenly inquired the duchess.

"He? Who? The ghost?"

"No—the earl?"

"He stepped out with the doctor. Shall I call him?" inquired the duchess, rising and stretching her hand toward the bell.

"No! No! No!" exclaimed her daughter, starting up in an excess of excitement, and seizing her mother's arm to arrest her movement.

The elder lady desisted, and sat down much perplexed.

"No, do not call him! Do not let him come near me! I never wish to see his face again! I never will, if I can help it! Oh, mamma! mamma; take me home with you! Take me home, or I shall go mad!" exclaimed the countess, her eyes flaming, her face crimson as with approaching frenzy.

The duchess looked at her daughter in alarm. That the countess had been suddenly smitten with some fearful fever that affected her brain was the mildest theory she could form of the case.

"My dear, dear child, do not talk so wildly. Try to compose yourself, Volante," she said, laying her cool, soft hand upon the flushed forehead of the young lady.

But the countess seized that hand in both hers, and clung to it, while she fixed her frantic eyes on her mother's, and exclaimed:

"Will you take me home, then? To-day? At once? I cannot stay in this accursed house—I cannot! Oh! I cannot! I cannot be a party to this—this—— Oh! I cannot! Oh, mamma! will you take me home with you?"

"Yes, yes, of course I will, my love. I will take you home with me," replied the duchess, in the soothing tone with which she would have humored the fancy of a delirious child.

"To-day! No! At once! Oh, I cannot breathe, I cannot live in this infernal house! I cannot lie on this bed!" exclamied the countess, suddenly starting up before her mother could prevent her and beginning to walk the floor with quick, irregular steps.

The duchess seized the bell and rang it violently, and then rushed to the side of her daughter just in time to catch her in her arms and prevent her from falling to the floor.

The duchess eased her gently down into an armchair that happened to be at hand, and laid her back upon it.

Her eyes were still blazing and her face flaming with intense nervous excitement.

The lady's maid entered in answer to the bell.

"Has Dr. Ellis left the house?" demanded the duchess.

"No, madame."

"Send him hither, quickly, and come back yourself."

"*Oui*, madame," said the young woman, withdrawing from the room.

The doctor soon reëntered, and seemed startled even out of his medical coolness at the sight of the woman in the chair.

"You see her. She is very ill. Oh, what is it, Dr. Ellis? Is it this fever that I hear has broken out in the——?"

"Oh, no, no, your grace; do not be alarmed. It is not the fever—not that fever, at least," replied the physician, as he took the hand of the countess and consulted her pulse.

"Tell her to take me away, doctor! I cannot stay! Oh, I cannot stay in this house of horrors! this house of horrors! this house of horrors!" cried the unhappy lady, with the reiteration peculiar to the excited stage of brain fever.

"Certainly, my lady! Certainly! But you are not very strong now. I will just give you a little draught to strengthen you while they are getting the carriage ready," said the doctor blandly, as he left the room to get his portable medicine chest and prepare a powerful sedative.

"Why do you wish to leave this house, my love?" inquired the duchess, very injudiciously; but, then, she was inexperienced in these cases.

Her daughter stared at her for a moment, and then answered, with the cunning that sometimes attends madness:

"Ah! you wish to entrap me into telling; but I will never tell! never tell! never tell! never tell!"

The doctor reëntered the room with a small cordial glass, half filled with a golden liquid, that looked pretty and smelled sweet, and tasted deliciously, yet it was a cun-

ningly disguised sedative, one of the most potent in the whole pharmacopœia.

"Drink this, my lady, and you will be strong enough for your drive," said the doctor artfully, as he held the glass toward her.

She took it, looked at him cunningly, and said:

"Yes, but I will never tell! never tell! never tell! I had no part in it! I will not profit by it! I will not! I will not! I will not! I will not!"

"No, no more would I! But drink that delicious cordial, my lady! See, you are spilling it!" said the doctor soothingly, as he guided her shaking hand with the glass to her lips.

"I know it was he! It was he! It was he! It was he!" she cried over and over many times, as she stared in the face of the doctor.

"Of course it was he, and no one else, my lady! You are quite right. But do drink this," said the doctor.

"It was not, then! It was not! You try to catch me up! But I will not tell! I will not! I will——"

"Drink this, dear, dear Lady Hawkewood," said the doctor persuasively, pressing the glass upon her.

She seized it and swallowed the contents at a gulp, as if to get rid of an impertinent interruption, and then continued her wild talk just from where it had been broken off—

"Not tell! Not tell! Not tell—— Oh-h-h, my broken life!" she suddenly wailed, dropping her chin upon her bosom.

After this she raved no more; but partly from the exhaustion of her paroxysm of excitement, partly from reaction, and partly from the effects of the drug, she became quiet, and submitted to be undressed by attendants and put to bed.

But the duchess did not leave her daughter's bedside that night, nor did the doctor leave the house.

The countess slept at once profoundly and painfully; for while she was sunk in deep unconsciousness of all her real surroundings, she mutteerd in her sleep of other deeds and places, and rolled her head continually, and threw her arms about and sometimes started up, glared around the

darkened room and then fell back on her pillow without waking.

When the doctor visited her in the morning he found her condition much worse. She was not awake, nor yet was she wholesomely asleep, but in a stupor, disturbed by a low delirium, while her face was almost purple, her head burning hot and her pulse racing.

The duchess, who was still seated at the bedside of her child, raised her eyes anxiously to those of the doctor.

"I would like a consultation, your grace. Shall I telegraph for your London physician?"

"If you please," said the duchess, turning very pale.

"Pray do not be alarmed, your grace! Though I deem it necessary to take every precaution, I should—should say there is no present cause for undue anxiety," said Dr. Ellis, speaking very cautiously.

"Send a telegram at once for Sir James Meriot, doctor, if you please."

Dr. Ellis left the room and dispatched the message to the telegraph office by a groom on a fast horse, and then returned to the sick room.

"What is the nature of her illness, Dr. Ellis?" inquired the duchess, trying to curb her intense anxiety and to speak calmly.

"It is a brain fever, your grace, occasioned, I think, by some hidden severe shock to the nervous system," replied the physician gravely.

"What could it have been? Hawkewood says he met her at midnight in the hall near the archway leading to the bachelors' corridor, at the end of which is the gentlemen's smoking-room, you know, which he had left and locked up some few minutes before."

"What could her ladyship have been doing in the hall at that hour?" inquired the physician.

"We do not know. Hawkewood thought she was there looking for him. He was about to speak to her when she started, stared at him, and then, with a piercing shriek, fell down in a deep swoon. He lifted her in his arms and brought her here. After we had all been called to her bedside, and used all our skill to recover her, we sent for

you, whom our messenger fortunately met near the lodge gate."

"Yes, I had just come from Traverse's wife, your grace."

"Ah, I did not know. Is Mrs. Traverse ill?"

"No, your grace. She is as well as can be expected and is rejoicing over her ninth boy."

"Oh, doctor, what do you suppose could have frightened Volante in the hall last night?" inquired the duchess, who could not long keep up her interest in the steward's wife and baby.

"I do not know, your grace, I cannot conjecture, unless, in the uncertain light, her ladyship mistook the earl for a stranger—a—a——"

"A burglar, you were about to say. Well, she might have done so, yet that would scarcely account for an extremity of terror so intense as to hurry her into a brain fever. I believe, on the contrary, that if Volante had met a real burglar, she would have been more indignant than frightened; she would have given the alarm, not have fallen into a swoon," said the duchess.

"In her normal state of health, madam, for she is a young lady of spirit. But your grace should take into account that her ladyship's present delicate situation modifies her normal condtion very materially and renders her peculiarly susceptible to impressions."

"That is true," said the duchess, with a deep sigh.

This conversation had been carried on in a very low tone by the two watchers, so as not to disturb the restless sleeper.

Now, however, the deep moans of the patient drew the duchess and the doctor silently to the bedside.

The countess was moaning and muttering in low delirium.

The duchess bent to hear her words, and shrank back appalled.

"To slay him for his coronet! But I will never tell—never tell—never tell!"

The duchess sank back in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

The doctor heard, too, and looked down at his boots.

" 'Guilty,' did they say 'guilty'? No, no, I never told! A wife cannot bear witness against her—— What is that?

What is he putting on his head? A black cap—Oh, no! not hanged!—peer of the realm! Who said he did it? Not I——"

"Heaven of heavens, doctor, give her something to stop this frightful raving!" exclaimed the duchess, beside herself with horror.

"Madam, I dare not. I have administered as many opiates and sedatives as it is safe to give," said the doctor, as he took the oilskin bag from the top of the sufferer's head and filled it with crushed ice and replaced it.

But the fever-stricken woman rambled on and on, talking confusedly of a midnight murder, of a trial and execution, of infamy overwhelming a noble family; but mixing up time, place, and circumstances as only the delirious can ever do.

"Oh, doctor, this is terrible! What does it all mean?" inquired the duchess, pale with undefinable horror.

"Delirium, madam, nothing more," said the physician quietly.

"But, oh, what could have put such dreadful things into her head?"

"A dream, something that she had read, or something she had heard just before her attack. But there is no certain way of explaining the course taken by the wanderings of delirium," replied the doctor, with a reassuring smile.

The raving girl continued to rave until the paroxsym had gradually exhausted her strength, when she sank into stupor, breathing heavily.

So, alternating between wild delirium or muttering stupor, the young countess passed the day.

The duchess never left her side.

The duke came at intervals and stood looking with a troubled face upon his unconscious daughter.

The earl was in and out every few minutes; but as he came and went noiselessly, no one interfered to prevent the frequency of his visits to the sick chamber.

The countess did not notice him or anyone else. She had ceased to recognize her surroundings.

Late in the afternoon the great court physician, Sir Jame Meriot, who had recently been knighted by the queen, arrived at Hawkewood Hall.

He was received by the duke, who briefly gave him an account of Lady Hawkewood's sudden and mysterious attack of illness, and then conducted him to the sick chamber.

The duchess gravely welcomed him, and gave him a brief history of the case as she led him to the bedside of her suffering daughter.

The village doctor, Dr. Ellis, was still seated at the bedside, watching the patient, but he now arose, and with a grave inclination of the head, greeted and gave place to the eminent London practitioner.

Sir James Meriot stood looking quietly at the tossing and muttering form before him half a minute before he touched her pulse, counting it by the gold repeater he held in his left hand.

Then, without the least change of countenance that might give a sign to the anxious eyes that were watching him, he put up his watch and turned to the duchess, asking:

"Will your grace be good enough to allow me a few moments with Lady Hawkewood's usual medical attendant—Dr. Ellis, if I am not mistaken?"

"Yes, certainly, Dr. Ellis, Sir James," rather nervously replied the anxious mother, as she bowed, took the arm of the duke, and with him left the room.

The consultation by the bedside was not long, nor did it disturb the patient, whose mind seemed far away from the scene around her.

At the end of half an hour the great London practitioner wrote out two prescriptions and some general directions, left them with Dr. Ellis, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXVI

"I WILL NOT LIVE WITH HIM"

Sir James Meriot was met in the hall by the agitated parents of the patient.

"Is she dangerously ill, Sir James? But I need not ask that question. Is there any hope? Tell me that!" said

the duchess, unconsciously wringing her plump hands as she spoke.

"There is no immediate danger, your grace. If my instructions are carefully carried out, I have no doubt of a favorable issue," politely replied the great court physician.

"What is the nature of Lady Hawkewood's malady, Sir James?" inquired the duke, who was equally anxious, though more self-controlled than the duchess.

"Brain fever, your grace—brought on apparently by some mental shock," replied the great authority.

"Impossible, Sir James! The shock, I mean, of course—not the fever. She can have had no mental shock of any sort," exclaimed the duke impulsively.

"I stand corrected," replied the infallible court physician, whom royalty had knighted, and, bowing stiffly, he left the hall and went down to enter the carriage that was to take him back to Hawkeville to catch the nine-thirty train to London.

The butler, bowing to the ground, intercepted the great man, threw open the doors of the elegant little lunch room, where a tempting repast was spreadfi and bowed him in to the table.

Professional irritability felt itself soothed down at the sight of oysters on the half shell, pickled salmon, quails on toast, venison ham, mayonnaise, champagne on ice, and other tempting delicacies to eat and drink.

He sat down, tucked a napkn under his chin, and suffered himself to be mollified by the table luxuries before him, and to be worshiped by the reverential butler in attendance.

But the great London physician, for whom noble and royal patients might be waiting, must not miss his train. So he spent no more time at the table than was necessary to do full justice to the luxuries before him.

Having completed his meal, he went to his carriage, was driven rapidly to Hawkeville, where he arrived in time to take his train to London.

For days and nights the life of the young Countess of Hawkewood was in extremest peril.

The duchess never left her daughter's apartment. The duke and earl came in with slippered feet almost every

hour. The village doctor came twice a day. The great London physician made his weekly visits.

For many days the countess lay unconscious of all around her.

At length the hour came when she recovered her consciousness and cast feeble but intelligent glances around her.

Her rejoicing mother bent over her right side and kissed her softly.

Her husband bowed over her left side and would have kissed her brow, but, on recognizing his face, she uttered a wild though half-suppressed cry, covered her eyes with her thin hands, and shook with agitation from head to foot.

"Oh, my lord, withdraw. I entreat you to withdraw, or your presence will kill her!" pleaded the duchess, in a low, agonized tone.

"What in the name of Heaven can be the meaning of this?" demanded the highly provoked man.

"I do not know. Some remains of her delirium, I suppose. Oh, pray go, and do not speak above your breath. When she is better, no doubt she will get over this strange caprice. We should be so thankful she is out of danger, Hawkewood; we must not risk a relapse," said the duchess in an imploring tone.

The earl silently and sulkily complied, and left the sick room.

There was no mistaking the look of wild, pallid horror and abhorrence with which his young wife had stared into his face as she uttered that low, agonized cry, and covered her eyes, shuddering from head to foot.

He was both perplexed and offended by such an exhibition of terror and disguest.

What could it mean? he asked himself, as he tried to recall every incident of his encounter with her on the night of her strange attack of illness.

Suddenly he stopped short in his walk toward the staircase and turned deadly pale, and clutched a pillar to prevent himself from falling to the ground.

"My ——! She suspects!" he muttered hoarsely, as he tried to steady himself.

Footsteps approached up the softly carpeted stairs.

The elegant Sir James Meriot, the court physician—

fresh face, fine silver hair and beard, immaculate linen, closely buttoned up black broadcloth body coat, gray pants, gray gloves, and polished patent leather boots—came up on the landing, ushered by the pompous porter in person.

"Good-morning, my lord! I hope we are better this morning," said the knightly doctor, alluding to the lady in the sick room and not to himself and the earl, as might have been supposed.

"Thanks, Sir James, the countess has shown signs of returning consciousness, but it is attended with considerable nervous excitement," replied the earl, striving to recover his own self-control.

"Ah, ah, and this symptom alarms you, my dear lord," observed Sir James, looking with a keen professional eye on the earl, and probably mistaking the cause of his agitation. "This symptom alarms you. Very natural but unnecessary anxiety, of course. We will soon set all that right. Let me see my patient."

The earl bowed assent and attended the doctor to the door of the sick room.

"Will you not go in?" inquired the physician, thus expressing his willingness to allow the husband a place at the bedside where he was attending the wife.

"No, thanks, Sir James. My wife cannot bear the sight of me," said the earl, speaking impulsively and bitterly, and the next moment regretting that he had spoken at all.

"Oh, ah—quite so. Very natural, but unpleasant, of course. I have known such cases of sudden aversion under such circumstances. It will pass away, my dear lord. It will pass away. With the birth of your heir all will be well," said the affable physician, as they paused for a moment before the door.

"I would like to have a little talk with you after your visit to the countess," said Lord Hawkewood.

"Certainly! Certainly, my dear lord," replied Sir James, as he passed into the sick room.

The earl remained pacing up and down the upper hall for about fifteen minutes longer, at the end of which time the great physician came out and joined him there, saying cheerily:

"We are doing very well! very well, indeed! The crisis

is past. The countess will recover. But, my dear lord, her ladyship must not be subjected to any agitation such as she suffered this morning. We must be patient, my dear lord! We must be patient."

"What is the cause of the sudden aversion the countess has taken to me—her husband? I have given her no cause of offense, as Heaven knows! What, then, can be the reason?" inquired the earl, as he took the arm of the doctor and they walked up and down the hall.

"Her ladyship's condition, my dear lord, as I hinted before. It not unfrequently happens so. Why, there was the Princess—— But I must not betray professional secrets, you know. It is enough to say that I have met several such cases in the course of my practice. Whim, fantasy, caprice, we might almost call it, but I say it is the condition."

They had now reached the head of the stairs, and the court physician, turning, said:

"Good-day, my lord. I have to catch my train, you know."

But the earl went downstairs with the doctor, where the butler met them and solemnly marshaled them into the elegant little dining-room, where a dainty luncheon was laid, and where the court physician—as on former occasions—forgot his hurry in the enjoyment of the luxuries set before him.

On this occasion the earl sat down and joined the doctor.

But there was no more talk on medical or other disturbing topics—the experienced physician respected his digestion too much for that sort of conversation at table.

When the lunch was over, Sir James Meriot took a second leave of the earl, entered his carriage and drove off to the station.

The earl walked about the house disconsolately. He only half believed the doctor's theory of his wife's aversion.

After a little while he retraced his steps and went up to the bedroom door and rapped.

The duchess opened the door, came out to him, and closed it after her.

"How is Volante now?" he inquired in a low voice.

"She is better. She has taken a little nourishment, and is quiet," replied the duchess in a whisper.

"Is she asleep?"

"No, but she is calm, under the influence of a sedative that the doctor has just administered."

"Can I see her now?"

"No. Oh, pray do not think of such a thing! Give her time to recover. The doctor says she must not be agitated."

"It is a confounded shame, I think, that a wife should have taken such a dislike to a husband who has never given her any cause of offense," muttered the young earl, with a sort of boyish ill temper.

"It is very unreasonable and provoking, I admit, Hawkewood—very. But she has been extremely ill, you know, and her brain and nervous system have been so severely implicated in this illness. You must give the poor child time to recover her reason. I will expostulate with her as soon as she is able to bear the subject. In the meantime be patient, dear Hawkewood, and do not risk appearing before her for the present. The longer you forbear the sooner she will recover," said the duchess soothingly.

"She must be insane, I think," muttered the earl petulantly.

"Undoubtedly her mind is unbalanced at the present time. That is the only excuse for her strange behavior," the duchess replied in a conciliating tone.

"I shall try to see her to-morrow, at all events," said the earl.

"Yes, certainly," replied the duchess vaguely, not committing herself to any particular meaning as to whether he should "see" his wife, or only "try" to do so.

There they parted.

The earl went downstairs, lighted his cigar, and took a stroll through the park, wondering who was right and who was wrong as to the cause of his wife's sudden and violent antipathy to him.

Meanwhile the duchess returned to the sick room, shut and bolted the door, and went and seated herself by the bedside of her daughter.

Lady Hawkewood was lying quietly on her back, with her head upon her dainty, laced pillow, her thin hands

folded over her bosom, her eyes closed, and her whole form composed, like one from which the soul had fled—like one prepared for the tomb. The rich rose-colored silk and lace-covered counterpanes that lay over her, the rich white lace and rose silk-lined curtains that fell around the bedstead, all lent a delicate bloom to the white face and hands that they did not otherwise possess.

As the duchess sank into the easy-chair beside the bed the patient opened her dark eyes and whispered:

"Mamma."

"Yes, dearest."

"Who was that at the door?"

"Your husband, love, anxiously inquiring for you," ventured the duchess, who was sorry the next moment that she had done so, for the calm form on the bed shuddered, and the calm voice trembled as the countess replied:

"Oh, I wish he would not! I wish he would not! Oh, mamma! never call him my husband again! He is no husband of mine! There can be nothing between us henceforth and forever more!"

"My dearest Volante!" exclaimed the duchess, in amazement and distress, for she certainly thought that the lady's sudden abhorrence of her leige lord was something greater than could be accounted for by her "condition."

"Mamma!" said the countess, in an excess of nervous excitement that was only partly controlled by the sedative she had taken—"Mamma! the last thing I remember up to the time of my illness was my imploring you to take me away from this demon house and carry me home. And you promised to do it at once. But you did not. Why did you not?"

"You were too ill to be moved, Volante. You had to be put to bed, dearest. And now you are still too ill to talk. Compose yourself, my love."

"Mamma, I may refrain from talking, but I cannot refrain from thinking—from feeling. It is a relief to talk."

The duchess made no reply. She thought that if she herself should speak no more than was strictly necessary, the conversation would flag and her capricious daughter subside into silence. She was mistaken, of course.

Lady Hawkewood suddenly looked up and said:

"Mamma, you must take me home with you to Belle Isle, and papa must take measures for a separation between me and that man."

"My beloved child; whatever do you mean?" gasped the horrified duchess.

"I cannot live with him again, mamma! I cannot, and I will not! Understand that, please."

"Volante! Volante!" cried the duchess, who was now much the more excited of the two.

"Mamma, I abhor myself for having married that man—that monster of wickedness and hypocrisy! I detest the very sight of his face—the very sound of his voice. I will never, so help me Heaven, I will never hear the one or see the other while I live, if I can avoid doing so!"

"My child! my child! this is th—the effect of your illness."

"Not so, mamma! My illness and my resolution are both the effects of that man's—conduct. I would as soon mate with the lowest felon in Penzance jail as with him. You must not let him come to the door again, mamma! Keep him entirely away, until you can take me away from this accursed house."

"Oh, Volante! What is the reason of this sudden, deep hatred you have conceived for Hawkewood?" demanded the duchess, in extremity of distress.

The countess did not reply. She was gazing down on her own wan, white fingers as she idly twined and untwined them.

A sudden light seemed to break on the duchess' mind. She thought she had discovered that the most frequent cause of estrangement between husband and wife—jealousy—was at the root of Lady Hawkewood's deep offense, and with a smile she inquired:

"Has he given you any cause for doubting his fidelity, my love?"

The countess looked at her mother long and fixedly, and then said:

"Oh, I understand. You think I am jealous. Why should I be jealous of that man? He is nothing to me. He may go to Utah, if he pleases. I wish he would go somewhere out of the country."

"Then you are not jealous of him?" inquired the duchess, again disturbed in her mind.

The young countess curled her lovely lip with gentle disdain as she answered contemptuously:

"If my mother had not asked that question I should say it was a very silly one."

"Then if he has given you no cause to doubt his fidelity to you, what has been the nature of Lord Hawkewood's offense?" demanded the elder lady.

The younger one put her hands over her eyes and shivered.

"For Heaven's sake tell me what Hawkewood has done to forfeit your affection? What great crime has he committed?" demanded the duchess, not dreaming that there could be any question of crime in the case, but merely using the words as a formula of gentle sarcasm.

But the effect on Lady Hawkewood was startling.

She sprang up on her pillow, and, leaning on her elbow, gazed at her mother with great, dilating, dark eyes and pallid cheeks, while, with ashen lips, she muttered:

"Who said he had committed a crime? I did not! I never said so! Never! never! never!"

"My beloved child, I did not mean to speak so strongly. I should have said indiscretion, misdemeanor, rather than —crime," replied the duchess.

"I will never tell! I will never, never tell!" exclaimed the countess, dropping back exhausted upon her pillow, where she lay trembling and gasping for breath.

The duchess, beside herself with alarm and confusion, went and poured out a dose of the sedative the doctor had left, and came and raised her daughter's head and placed the medicine to her lips.

Lady Hawkewood drank it obediently and became more composed.

The duchess did not dare to venture any other remark, for fear of provoking an exciting discussion that might be pernicious or even fatal to her daughter.

But that lady herself resumed the conversation, though in a calmer tone; for the sedative had partly subdued her excitement.

"Mamma, I told you I cannot, and I will not, live with that man."

The poor duchess bowed in a silent, non-committal sort of way.

"Mamma, I must take you partly into my confidence—not wholly, for I will never, never do that with anyone."

"Tell me anything you like, my dear; only try to keep calm," said the elder lady.

"Mamma, you may think my deep and strong antipathy to—that man——"

"My love—why do you call him 'that man,' instead of the earl, or Lord Hawkewood?" the duchess could not refrain from asking.

"Because he has no more right to the earldom of Hawkewood than the highway robber has to the purse he has wrested from the murdered traveler!" exclaimed the countess in an excited tone. Then impulsively clapping her hand upon her lips, as if to stop their further utterance, she stared in a sort of panic of terror at her mother.

"What do you mean, love? The earl no more right to his earldom than the highwayman to the purse of the traveler he has murdered?" inquired the duchess, forgetting her good resolution of not encouraging her daughter to talk.

"No, no, no, I did not mean that! I spoke hastily—hastily. Don't mind what I said. I am not well, you know," moaned the lady.

"You said you would take me partly into your confidence," sighed the duchess, who was penetrated with an intense curiosity that conquered prudence.

"Yes, I must take you into my confidence, dearest mamma; but first ask you to give me your sacred promise that you will never reveal the secret that I must confide to you," said the countess, with terrible earnestness.

"I give you my sacred promise," said the duchess, who would have said anything to soothe the sufferer, whom she was beginning to look upon as a monomaniac.

"Promise also to take me away from this place as soon as I shall be able to go."

"I promise," said the duchess, in the same time-serving spirit.

"Then, mamma, listen to me. Bend down your ear to my lips."

The duchess did as she requested.

"I have made a discovery which renders it my solemn duty, no less than my irresistible impulse, to separate myself, at once and forever, from the felon who dares to call himself the Earl of Hawkewood!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRIDE'S HATE

"VOLANTE! Heaven of heavens, Volante!" exclaimed the duchess, beside herself with amazement.

"I do not overstate the case, mamma," replied the young bride, with bitter calmness.

"But do you know what you say?"

"I say that I have made a discovery which renders it a solemn duty to separate myself at once and forever from that felon who dares to call himself the Earl of Hawkewood and my husband!"

"Oh, Volante, your mind must have been deranged from your illness, my dear child, to harbor such dreadful imaginings!" shuddered the duchess.

"My mind may be deranged. But that does not alter the fact that I have had enough to derange it. My mind may have been deranged by my late illness, but what caused that illness, if not the discovery I made?" sadly inquired the young lady.

"What was that discovery, Volante?" earnestly demanded the duchess.

"Oh, mamma, I cannot tell you! I can never, never tell you! Do not ask me, dear mamma. Get my father to speak to that man about a permanent separation. I do not want the income he settled on me! I would not touch a penny of that money if I were starving! I want it all returned to him—every penny of it! I do not want the diamonds, or India shawls, or any other of his presents! I would not wear any of them if my life depended on my

doing so! Give him back every iota of money, jewels, or anything else he has ever given me! There is contamination in their contact! And take me away from this accursed place, where it is deadly sin and desperate misery to remain!" said the unhappy young lady, exciting herself to fever again.

"And you will not tell me the discovery you have made, or you suppose you have made," exclaimed the elder lady, in desperation.

"Mamma! Like the Roman matron, I would bite my own tongue off and spit it out if I thought it could ever speak that secret! Like the English martyr, I would hold my right hand in the fire and burn it to cinders if I feared that it could ever write the secret! I would mutilate myself—I would make myself dumb and helpless—if I believed myself capable of communicating that secret to any living being—even to you! I must keep it close within my own aching bosom, even though its presence there is killing me! Do not question me further, mamma, but, if you wish to save my reason, get me out of this fatal house at once!" wildly exclaimed the countess.

"Do not, I beseech you, agitate yourself so much, my love. I will do all that you ask. You shall really leave this place and return with me to Belle Isle as soon as you shall be able to travel. And, in the meantime, you shall not be distressed by the presence of Hawkewood in your chamber. I will speak to him and get Ellis to speak to him on the subject," said the duchess, in a soothing tone that it cost her some effort of sustain, since she herself was deeply agitated.

"Do not delay, mamma. Act at once! Every time I hear a footstep in the hall outside I dread the appearance of that monster in the room! Lock the door, mamma! Go lock the door! If he should come in, the sight of him would kill me!" she cried, turning and burying her face in the pillows.

The duchess went and turned the key and then came back to the bedside, poured out a composing draught from a bottle that stood on the stand near the head of the bedstead, into a little porcelain cup that she held in her hand, and offered it to her daughter, whispering:

"Drink this, my love, and leave all your affairs in my hands. I will see to them."

Volante obediently emptied the cup and returned it to her mother.

"Now lie down and shut your eyes, and try to go to sleep."

"Will you first call Greylock to sit beside me, while you go and talk to my father about getting me away from here, and, if necessary, talk to—that felon also, for I will leave him, if to do so I may have to leave this world!" cried the countess vehemently.

"Oh, my love, do not talk so madly. Of course, you shall do as you please. You are no man's slave. Your father and myself will see that you have your will. Be quiet now, dear. The quieter you are the sooner you will recover, and be able to return with us to Belle Isle. Let that consideration influence you," said the troubled duchess.

Apparently "that consideration," together with the action of the drug, did "influence" the agitated invalid.

She turned her face to the wall and composed herself as if for sleep.

The duchess rang for her maid.

The woman soon came and rapped softly in response.

The duchess arose, opened the door and admitted her, saying:

"I wish you to lock this door after me and admit no one at all, except myself, or the doctor."

"Certainly, your grace. And if my lord should come——" began Mrs. Greylock.

"If Lord Hawkewood should come, you are to tell him that her ladyship is sleeping under the influence of an opiate, and the orders are that she must not be disturbed."

"Yes, your grace."

"When you have locked the door after me, seat yourself beside Lady Hawkewood and watch her carefully until my return."

"Yes, your grace."

The duchess then passed out of the sick room, and in walking down the hall came face to face with Dr. Ellis, who had just arrived.

"Come into my boudoir," said her grace, after the usual

greetings were over—"I must have a little talk with you before you see your patient."

"How is her ladyship this afternoon?" inquired the physician, as he followed the lady into the elegant apartment she had appropriated as her boudoir.

"She has been very much excited all the morning. She is now sleeping under the influence of an opiate."

"Then I had better not disturb her. I can return at a later hour, when her ladyship will be likely to be awake."

"Oh—if you have no pressing visits to make, you can sit here and talk with me."

"I have no pressing visits to make, and I am quite at the disposal of your grace," said Dr. Ellis, with a low bow.

"We must speak of your patient, and, my dear doctor, we must speak quite confidentially."

"By all means, my dear duchess."

"The subject is a very delicate one, upon which, under usual circumstances, I should be perfectly reticent, for it involves the discussion of—family matters and—morals."

The duchess paused and the doctor bowed gravely.

"A most distateful theme to introduce even to our family physician, yet in the interests of our beloved patient, I must not shrink from it."

"Consider your grace's family physician in the light of an humble father confessor, whom no secret can surprise, or—escape," said the doctor, with earnest gravity.

"I do, I do indeed, Dr. Ellis. To come to the point: My dear daughter, Lady Hawkewood, has taken a sudden, unreasonable, and most insane aversion to her husband."

"To ladies in the countess' delicate situation, such sudden dislike, though uncommon, is not unknown to medical experience, as I believe I hinted to your grace once before," replied the doctor.

"Oh, but this is no mere dislike growing out of nervous irritability. This aversion amounts to disgust, horror, and abhorrence! And—listen, Dr. Ellis," said the duchess, dropping her voice—"She says that this detestation is founded on a discovery which she made on the night in which she was taken ill, and which indeed seems to have been the cause of her illness."

"A discovery! Of what nature, if I may be permitted to ask, your grace?"

"She will not tell me! She declares in the most positive manner that she will die before she will tell, and that she will die sooner than continue to live with Lord Hawkewood."

"Oh! Ah! Ah!" muttered the doctor to himself, as if to say that he saw it all now.

"Speak out, if you please. What do you think of all this?" somewhat impatiently demanded her grace.

"May I do so without offense, my dear duchess?" courteously demanded the doctor.

"Most certainly you may. It is just what I wish you to do. Just why I brought you here. I want your opinion," said the lady firmly.

"Then, your grace, I fear that our beautiful countess may be—let us say—morbidly jealous! Not an unusual state in young wives."

"No, doctor! You are mistaken. That was also my first suspicion, and I taxed her with it; but she laughed the thought to bitter scorn. Whatever her discovery might have been, it was not of a nature to make her jealous."

"My dear duchess, jealousy is one of the last foibles that a young lady would willingly acknowledge! Depend upon it, the mysterious discovery is simply this: that our lovely countess, in her walk through the bachelors' corridor that night, came suddenly upon his lordship amusing himself with talking nonsense to one of the housemaids! And with the sensitiveness inseparable from her delicate condition she mentally exaggerated the circumstance to such an extent as to make herself ill! Depend upon it, that is the explanation of her ladyship's conduct, my dear duchess," said the doctor.

"I do not think so; but since you have no other theory to advance, I must proceed to ask your assistance in what I am forced against my better judgment to do."

"Your grace may command me in all things," said the doctor, with a bow.

"The Earl of Hawkewood is naturally filled with sorrow and indignation by this sudden and extreme antipathy of the countess to him, and of which she will give no explana-

tion, yet which is so powerful that the very sight of his lordship's face, or the sound of his voice, is enough to shake her nerves to the verge of convulsions."

"This is very deplorable!" sighed the doctor.

"Exceedingly so! Now, what I wish you to do, in your medical capacity, is to examine into Volante's condition in reference to this point, and when you shall be convinced that a temporary separation for the benefit of the countess' health is absolutely necessary, you will, in your professional capacity of medical adviser to the family, set the matter in its proper light before the earl and induce him to consent that his wife shall return with us to Belle Isle. You are the proper person to suggest and enforce this matter," concluded her grace.

"I will suggest and urge this measure. I have no power to enforce it," replied the doctor, with a slight smile.

"But you will do the best you can," persisted the duchess.

"Most assuredly I will, your grace, and no doubt the Earl of Hawkewood will be amenable to reason."

He of whom they spoke now rapped softly at the door.

The duchess, who knew his lordship's signal, invited him to enter.

The Earl of Hawkewood came in, bowed to the doctor and sank into a vacant chair. He looked pale and haggard, as if from anxiety and sleeplessness.

"My dear doctor, how do you find the countess to-day?" he inquired in a husky voice.

"Her ladyship is sleeping. I have not disturbed her to make an examination," replied the physician.

"Dr. Ellis desires to speak to your lordship in private on the subject of his patient's condition. Your entrance is so opportune, therefore, my dear Hawkewood, that I will leave you both together," said the astute duchess, with a smile, as she passed out of the boudoir.

The Earl of Hawkewood looked at the doctor with eager expectancy.

The physician, who felt as if he had been betrayed into a spring trap, cleared his throat, blew his nose, cleared his throat a second time, and spoke:

"It is of this strange and hysterical condition of the countess——" began the physician, and there he paused.

"You refer to her ladyship's sudden and unaccountable aversion to my presence," added the earl, helping the doctor.

"I do, my lord. Yet to a medical eye there is nothing very strange or at all unaccountable in the affair. The state of her ladyship's nervous system explains all to a professional mind," said the doctor soothingly, for he really pitied the distress of the young nobleman.

"You think, then, that this sudden and singular antipathy is attributable to her ladyship's state of health, and not to any imaginary cause of offense with me?" inquired his lordship.

"I certainly think her aversion due to her excessive nervous irritability, and to nothing else. But, my lord, it becomes my duty as Lady Hawkewood's medical attendant to warn you that her wishes on this subject should be indulged and not thwarted," said Dr. Ellis.

"But, my dear sir, the countess cannot endure the sight of me."

"Then, my dear lord, be patient and forbearing with her ladyship for a while and refrain from intruding into her presence," suggested the doctor.

"But she has even expressed a desire to leave my house and to go to the home of her parents," complained the young husband.

"Be magnanimous, my lord. Accede to that desire. It will soon pass away, and my lady will be glad enough to return."

The earl arose from his seat and walked up and down the floor uneasily. Then he paused before the physician, and earnestly said:

"Ellis, I speak to you not only as our medical attendant, but also as our old and tried friend, when I ask you: Do you really believe as you say in regard to the merely physically origin of my lady's strange antipathy, or may there be a graver cause?"

"I believe as I say. There is no cause deeper than that which exists in her ladyship's state of health, as every medical man might easily understand."

"And you think this intipathy will pass away?"

"I know it will pass away, if I know anything of the

nervous system in a state of health or disease," cheerfully replied the doctor.

"And you recommend that this—caprice of her ladyship be humored?"

"Decidedly I do. Thwart her in this 'caprice,' and your expected heir may be born a deformed dwarf or an idiot, or both. Indulge her in this 'caprice,' and all will go well with her."

"Then, my dear doctor, give your own professional orders in regard to her ladyship's removal to her father's house, where, let it be clearly understood, that she goes for a visit on account of her health, and with my full approbation," said the earl.

Dr. Ellis bowed assent, feeling much relieved in mind because he had performed his difficult mission with so much more ease than he could have hoped to do.

They conversed half an hour longer on various medical subjects, and then they were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Greylock, who came to say that the countess was awake, and the duchess had sent to ask the doctor to come and visit his patient.

"And pray return here when you have seen her ladyship," requested the earl.

Dr. Ellis followed the lady's maid to the sick room, where he found the countess much refreshed and calmed by her sleep, and where he cheered and comforted the mother and the daughter by the welcome news of the earl's consent to his wife's removal to the home of her parents.

"You see, dear love, that Hawkewood is kind. It must be very painful to him to consent to part with you under the circumstances, yet he does so very promptly for your pleasure," whispered the duchess, in a deprecating and conciliatory tone.

The countess smiled dubiously as she murmured in reply:

"I do not think that he would dare to refuse. I do not think he would venture to drive me to desperation. Where is he now?"

"I do not know, my love. Where is Hawkewood, doctor?" inquired the duchess, in a slightly elevated tone, as she turned to the medical attendant.

"I heard his lordship say, as I left him, that he was going to church," replied the latter.

"Ah! yes," remarked the duchess. "I must say that Hawkewood, for so young a man, is remarkably attentive to his religious duties—going to every week-day service as well as to the Sabbath worship."

The young countess curled her lips, and murmured indistinctly.

"What did you say, my love?" inquired the elder lady, bending over her.

"I said there must be some truth in the old proverb, that 'the greater the sinner the greater the saint,'" replied Volante.

"Oh! my love, my love, do not say such dreadful things in reference to your husband," whispered her mother.

"Mamma, he is not my husband! If you call him so you will drive me mad. I cannot recall or alter what is past; but for the future he is nothing to me," said Volante, with desperate earnestness.

The duchess and the doctor looked at each other in despair.

Then the eyes of the former seemed to ask the question: "What can be done in such a case?"

And those of the latter to answer:

"Nothing. Do not force the unwelcome subject upon her."

The doctor then left the necessary directions for the treatment of his patient, and took his leave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT BELLE ISLE

LATER in the afternoon the duchess sought the duke in the library, where she found him alone, engaged in reading.

He arose at her entrance and set a chair.

She dropped into the seat, and at once opened the subject of the proposed removal of the countess from Hawkewood Hall to Castle Belle Isle.

"The dreadful associations of this place are really too much for Volante in her delicate state of health. It was a very serious mistake to have brought her here at all," the duchess explained.

"We shall certainly be very happy to have our daughter with us again; yet, as this is to be her future home, it is a pity that she should be so very sensitive about its associations," replied the duke.

"It is; but so natural a feeling cannot be conquered, and it ought, indeed, to have been considered before she was brought here."

"But she had to come some time or other, as it is her husband's principal family seat."

"Yes; but her coming should have been delayed for some months longer, until after a certain event. Instead of such precaution, she was brought home here, of all the days in the year, upon the very anniversary of that awful tragedy. This was more than her nervous system could endure. She has succumbed to the trial. And now Ellis says that she must be taken away from this place. So it is settled that she is to return to Belle Isle with us."

"Quite so. Of course the earl accompanies his wife."

"No."

"No! Why not? There can be nothing that ought to detain him here?"

"My dear, have you not perceived the sudden dislike that Volante has taken to her husband since her illness?" gravely inquired the duchess.

"Yes, I have heard; but that is nonsense, you know! What right has Volante to take a dislike to her good husband, without any cause?" impatiently demanded the duke.

"No right at all! No more than she has to take a nervous fever. It is not a question of right, but fact. It is morbid, like her illness; but she is no more accountable for it than for her illness. Her medical attendant says that she must be indulged in this caprice. And Hawkewood himself has consented that Volante shall go alone to Belle Isle with us."

The duke left his seat and, frowning, walked slowly up and down the floor. He was full of surprise and disap-

pointment at this early separation of the young pair, which seemed ominous of evil.

"I will not have it so!" he said at length, returning to his seat. "I will not have the whole country set to gossiping about my family. Volante must remain here with her husband, or else Hawkewood must go to Belle Isle with his wife."

"This forced association will kill her!" groaned the duchess.

"There need be no forced association—no association of any kind between them. Hawkewood must accompany Volante to Belle Isle, if she is to go thither. But if our daughter's mind is in such a morbid condition that she cannot endure the presence of her husband, and if her medical attendant declares that she must be humored, why, we can see that she is humored. You can easily take Volante in your carriage and Hawkewood and myself can follow on horseback. She need not even know, while her caprice lasts, that the earl is in the castle. But he must go, if she goes," firmly concluded the duke.

"I am sure that you are quite right," readily conceded the duchess. "And I know that Hawkewood will agree with you; but we must really keep the fact of his accompanying us to Belle Isle and his presence in the castle a secret from Volante until she recovers. There is the dinner bell, and I am not dressed," added her grace, as she hastily left the library to repair to her own apartments to make her evening toilet.

All was arranged as had been agreed upon between the duke and the duchess.

The Earl of Hawkewood, with every appearance of satisfaction, acceded to the plan of accompanying his countess to Castle Belle Isle, and to having the fact of his presence there withheld from her knowledge.

The young countess on her part received the news of her approaching departure with unconcealed pleasure.

But when the subject of packing came to be discussed she startled her mother by saying:

"Have all my wedding outfit that came from my own family and friends packed up and sent off. But do not put the smallest trifle given me by the earl, nor the least

article that I have purchased since my marriage, with the money he settled on me, into my boxes; for, if you do, you will only oblige me to send them back; for remember, mamma, that I intend to return everything he ever gave me, marriage settlements and all, and that I shall never return to Hawkewood Hall, as this departure is merely a prelude to a permanent separation."

The duchess sighed deeply. She would have argued with her daughter on the unreasonableness of her conduct, but she did not dare to do so lest she would excite the invalid to hysteria or convulsions.

The good duchess had a difficult duty to do between her daughter and her husband and her son-in-law.

As soon as Lady Hawkewood was able to bear the journey she was wrapped up and placed in the comfortable carriage with her mother, and so conveyed to the ferryboat, and thence to Castle Belle Isle, where she was installed in her own rooms.

Her sisters and their governesses were not allowed to approach her on the first day of her arrival. Instructions had been sent to them that they must not come forward to meet their sister, whose shattered nervous system could not bear any more excitement for one day than the journey itself from Hawkewood to Belle Isle afforded.

So they allowed her to pass unnoticed to her private apartments, and consoled themselves by giving a hearty welcome to their father and their brother-in-law, who arrived in the castle half an hour later.

As soon as Lady Hawkewood reached her own rooms she sank down on the lounge of her bedchamber "with the sigh of a great deliverance," murmuring:

"Now, at last, I thank Heaven! I can breathe freely! Oh, the relief! the infinite relief of the escape from that accursed, blood-stained, phantom-ridden house! Mamma!"

"Well, my love!" breathed the solicitous and attentive mother, bending over her daughter.

"Let no one call me by that caitiff's name after this! Henceforth I am again Volante Belle Isle, understand!"

"It shall be as you please, love. No one is likely to call you by an obnoxious name. Your parents and sisters and brothers address you always as 'Volante,' and the servants

and dependents as 'my lady.' And no visitors or others will be permitted to intrude upon you."

"I thank you, dear mamma. Now I can rest easy," said the countess, with another deep inspiration, as she clasped her hands above her head and stretched out her feet at ease.

But she did not remain so many minutes. The eager, restless spirit impelled her to turn and ask:

"Mamma, have you spoken to my father about taking the proper steps toward a separation of myself from—that man?"

"No, my dear love, not yet; I——" began the dismayed duchess; but her daughter, with irritable impatience, interrupted her words.

"If you have not yet done so, mamma, when will you do it? Or shall I speak to papa on the subject?"

"Oh, my dear child, no. It would be inadvisable for you to move in this matter. Leave it all to me. I will speak to your papa in good time. Promise me, Volante, that you will not breathe this matter to the duke."

"I will promise, dear mamma, on condition that you undertake the task yourself. Of course, I would much rather that you should speak to papa on he subject, than that I should have to do it."

"Quite so, my love. Leave the affair in my hands," replied the duchess, in a non-committal manner that was not, however, perceived by Volante.

The duchess was very uneasy. She dreaded above all things that this subject of separation should be started between the duke and his daughter. She knew that the duke would not for a single instant tolerate the idea of such a public impropriety as the separation of the Earl and Countess of Hawkewood. And she also knew that his opposition to this measure would seriously injure the health and endanger the life of her daughter.

All that was possible she would do to prevent an interview between the father and child on this dreaded subject. She had already gained the pledge of Volante not to broach it to the duke.

Later in the day she took occasion to say to his grace:

"I wish you to promise me not even to name the Earl

of Hawkewood in the presence of my daughter. She grows more and more sensitive to the subject."

"Is she growing insane, then?" inquired the duke, with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, no! Heaven forbid! Her morbid fancies will pass away in time, no doubt."

"But meanwhile they are very trying."

"But we must have patience with her," pleaded the mother.

"Well, well, if Hawkewood can stand it, I can," replied the duke, as he strolled away.

The next disagreeable task that the duchess had to perform was to call her sons and daughters, with their governess, together, and warn them all of the peculiar turn the countess' illness had taken and to caution them all not to mention the name of the Earl of Hawkewood in the hearing of the invalid or to let her suspect his presence in the castle.

The astonished and wondering young people all expressed their sympathy and promised discretion.

After this, the servants had to be instructed in like manner, and when this was done the anxious mother hoped that all avenues of danger were closed.

In the quiet of her beloved Belle Isle the young Countess of Hawkewood improved rapidly. She soon recovered from all her ailments except—her deep-seated antipathy to the earl, which seemed to increase rather than to diminish.

She had no suspicion of Lord Hawkewood's presence in the castle. The secret had been carefully kept from her knowledge.

But when she grew able to leave her apartment the difficulty of keeping this secret was greatly augmented. There was daily, almost hourly, danger of her discovering it.

At this time, however, an event occurred that peremptorily summoned the Earl of Hawkewood to the north of England.

This was the illness and approaching death of his maternal grandfather, Mr. Humber, of Humber Hold, an aged squire of Northumberlandshire, by whose demise the young earl expected to inherit a large estate.

The duchess would have been shocked had anyone ven-

tured to hint that she could, under any circumstances, be brought to rejoice in the illness and death of any fellow creature; yet assuredly she could not regret the event that took Lord Hawkewood from Castle Belle Isle at this crisis.

As soon as his lordship had departed she again warned her husband and her household not to allude to the earl's existence in the persence of the countess, and then she began to decoy the nervous invalid from the seclusion of her sick chamber to lunch with the family, and to roll in a wheeled garden chair through the beautiful grounds immediately around the castle.

No one dared to speak to Volante of her husband. She had never spoken of him to anyone but to her mother. She had not the least suspicion that he had been at the castle.

One morning, while she was seated in her garden chair under the shade of a great oak tree on the lawn, attended by her mother and sisters, she sent them all away, retaining only her mother near her, to whom she said:

"Mamma, I have been here now nearly a month. I have not lately spoken to you on the hateful subject, thinking that if you had any very definite news to tell me you would impart it voluntarily. But you have been silent on this matter. Tell me now, however, what steps have been taken toward this legal separation between that man and myslef."

The poor duchess groaned at her daughter's persistence, and answered wearily:

"No steps have been taken as yet, my love. No steps were possible to be taken. Nothing has been done. Nothing could be done."

The countess turned and fixed her eyes upon those of her mother for a full minute, and then inquired:

"Are you trifling with me, mamma? Are you all playing with me? I will not bear it! I will not! If you do not act, I must. It would be a crime for me to live with Lord Hawkewood again!"

"Oh, my beloved child, have patience! You need not live with the earl, if you do not wish to do so. But for us to take any measures toward your legal separation just at this time would be a public scandal. The earl is absent in Northumberland, attending the dying bed of his grand-

father, old Squire Humber, of Humber Hold," said the duchess gravely.

The announcement seemed to surprise and quiet the countess.

"I had not heard of it," she said, in a subdued tone of voice.

"And you would not have heard of it if you had not called for an explanation of our inaction," replied the duchess.

From this hour Volante said no more on the subject of the separation, and as the old Northumbrian squire lingered long in his last illness and detained the young earl week after week in attendance at his bedside, and the countess was entirely relieved from the apprehension of his presence, she steadily regained her usual health and strength.

The garden carriage was abandoned for garden rambles. Her favorite companion in these walks was Isoline Irvine.

The beautiful orphan was more beautiful than ever. It was now thirteen months since she had lost her mother, and her first acute grief at her bereavement had gradually subsided into a tender, melancholy memory. She loved her lost mother even more deeply than ever before; but she no longer bewailed her loss.

Thre was much left in life to make life attractive to Isoline. She loved and was beloved.

Her lover was now at Gibraltar, but no week passed without bringing her two or three long, fervent letters from the young lieutenant, filled with protestations of the undying love that must bind their souls forever, and lamentations of the continued poverty that must keep their hands apart so long.

"If only Miss Smith had married like a human woman, and that colossal fortune had come to me! Then I should not need to wait for you until I get my captaincy and my gray hairs!" he wrote in the very last letter that she had received.

But aside from the interest that love gave to her life, there was another interest of another sort less keen—the interest of an intense curiosity in a profound mystery.

Isoline was in the habit of receiving from London, every

month, a blank envelope containing a Bank of England note for one hundred pounds. They began to come about three months previous to this date. She had now, therefore, received three, without a single word accompanying either of them to give a hint as to whom they came from, or why they were sent, or how long they would be continued. She had shown the first one to the duchess, and in much surprise and perplexity asked her opinion and counsel; but that grand dame, after having inspected the note, the envelope, the superscription, and the postmark, and learned nothing but that a hundred-pound Bank of England note had been sent from London in a blank envelope, directed in a bold, legal hand to Isoline Irvine, and having criticised the carelessness of persons in sending so considerable a sum of money in an unregistered letter, took the whole matter to the duke and submitted the mystery to his masculine wisdom for solution.

The duke suspected a bad practical joke with a good counterfeit note, and in his turn subjected the paper to the inspection of the Hawkeville banker, who at once pronounced it genuine—a "true bill."

Isoline had never possessed a quarter of such a sum in her life, except on the occasion of the sale of her mother's household furniture. Now she was very much "embarrassed" with her "riches."

She, however, followed the duke's advice and deposited the whole sum in the Hawkeville Bank, thereby opening an account with that trustworthy institution.

But when, on the first of October, another hundred-pound note came in the same mysterious manner and was found to be genuine, the great curiosity of the duchess would have set London detectives at work to discover the sender; but the duke put a stop to that transaction.

"Let the poor girl take the goods the gods provide and be thankful, but ask no questions, lest the inquiries should stop the supplies, which would be a very great pity, for her sake, for if they should continue to come, she will soon lay by a little independence," he said.

The duchess agreed with the justice of his views; the notes continued to come and to be deposited in the local bank, and the mystery remained unsolved.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE APPARITION IN THE PARK

LONGER and longer lingered the Earl of Hawkewood in Yorkshire, attending the deathbed of his slowly expiring grandsire.

His absence was felt as a very great relief to the young countess, who every day grew better and stronger in mind and body.

She so far lost all her nervous irritability and recovered her self-control that she no longer started or shuddered if her husband's name were accidentally mentioned in her presence.

The duchess was so much pleased by this improvement that she wrote daily bulletins of its progress to Lord Hawkewood at Humber Hold.

The bulletins she received from the earl were not so satisfactory. The paralyzed old Yorkshire squire lay always "in the same state," "no change," "no better," "no worse," were the burden of the letters or telegrams that came from Humber Hold.

In the beautiful October weather it was Volante's delight to wander with Isoline through the pleasure grounds of the castle, or around the sea beach that girdled the island. Sometimes, on a long forenoon, they would make the complete circuit of the coast and return to the house in time for lunch, with a good appetite, and with only fatigue enough to make the forenoon rest agreeable.

During the moonlight nights in October it was their pleasure to walk on the upper terrace of the castle lawn, and enjoy the beauty of the night scene over land and sea.

Volante, though she could not give Isoline her confidence so far as to impart to her the dark secret of her own bosom, yet drew the orphan girl out and sympathized with her in all her hopes, fears, and doubts.

"When are you and Cosmo going to be married?" the countess inquired of her companion one evening, as they were walking on the upper terrace under the moonlit sky.

The girl started and blushed, but did not answer.

"Now, love, surely you can speak to me of this affair.

Whom could you trust if not me? Are we not as sisters? Come, when will the wedding take place, sweet Isa?"

"Ah, Heaven knows! It is far off—very far off. Cosmo says he expects to be gray before he gets his command," answered Isoline, in a low tone.

"Must you wait for that?"

"I suppose so."

"Ah, if that Smith woman had only possessed heart enough to fall in love and marry, and so forfeit all the old princess' gold, so that Cosmo might have inherited it, what a great piece of good fortune that would have been! But she was too worldly! I hate a woman who prefers gold to love!"

"So do I," frankly admitted Isoline. "But Miss Smith may yet leave Cosmo her fortune, since she has no relatives of her own, and Cosmo was to have been heir, failing her," murmured Isoline.

"Yes, so she might, so she would if she had any sense of justice! But, dear girl, if that lady has inherited her aunt's longevity with her aunt's fortune she will live to see you and Cosmo and two generations of the present race die of old age before she finally gives up the ghost—and the money! Besides, dear, she is but forty-two years old, and, with her enormous fortune, she may marry, after all."

"What! at her age? Besides, I thought she was prohibited from marrying, under penalty of forfeiting the Zavieski fortune."

"She was so prohibited from marrying during her aunt's lifetime, but not after her aunt's death."

"Oh, indeed! I did not know that. How did you find it out?"

"I read it in the newspapers, Isoline. The will was so very strange that it was copied in some of the leading papers."

"Do you—do you—— Oh! what was that?" suddenly exclaimed Isoline, starting and breaking off from her discourse.

"What was—what?" inquired the countess.

"I thought—I thought I heard a step through the shrubbery quite close to us."

"It was a fancy, my dear. No one could be here. The

servants never come this way unless they are summoned or are in attendance on some one of the family. Go on with what you were saying."

"I was going to ask you if you think Miss Smith will ever marry at her age?"

"I cannot form an opinion, my dear. I know too little of her. There are women and women, you see——"

"But at her age! She if forty, or—— Oh, listen!" suddenly gasped the girl, in a frightened whisper.

"What now?" inquired the countess.

"That step again! I heard it more distinctly this time! It was no fancy."

"Nonsense! Don't be alarmed! It was a prowling cat. I hear the creatures crying half the night."

"No, no, it was no cat! It was a heavier step. A cat's step could not break the brushwood. This step crackled through the brushwood."

"Don't trouble so, my dear!"

"Oh, it is so lonely here! And the trees and shrubbery make it so dark."

"But we are quite safe here, love! Our island is like a stronghold. It is a stronghold! There are none here on Belle Isle except the family and the faithful servants! The ferryboat is also locked on this side! So not only is there no stranger on the island, but none could come here."

"Not in a rowboat?" inquired Isoline.

"Hum! I never thought of that. We and our friends and visitors use the ferryboat habitually in going and coming between Belle Isle and Hawkeville. Come, dear, it is dark and lonely here, and besides it is late, and——"

The speaker was startlingly interrupted by a piercing shriek from Isoline, who turned and fled toward the castle.

Volante followed at full speed.

Isoline's shrill scream had reached the castle hall, and the duke, followed by several of the menservants, hurried out to inquire the cause of the alarm.

They met the flying girls.

Isoline was foremost. The duke caught her arm and stopped her.

"My dear, what has happened?" he anxiously inquired.

"Oh, I cannot tell you! I cannot! I cannot! Let me

go! Let me go!" she wildly exclaimed, breaking from him and flying into the hall and up the staircase.

Volante came next, at full speed.

The duke seized her arm and caught her in turn.

"Volante! What does all this mean?" he inquired, more anxiously than before.

"Oh, papa, dear, something has frightened Isoline almost out of her senses!" replied his daughter, passing her hand through his arm and turning with him to enter the hall.

"What could have frightened her in our quiet grounds?" questioned the duke.

"She says it was some one lurking in the shrubbery."

"Rubbish! Did you see or hear anyone?"

"No, I did not, papa."

"And there was no one there. A bird rustled in the trees or a squirrel in the bushes. It must have been one of those that she heard."

"I think as you do, papa! But she does not think with us. She is terribly frightened. I must go to her, papa, if you please."

"Go, then, my love, and convince the girl of the absurdity of her fears."

The countess hurried away, ran upstairs and went directly to the chamber occupied by Isoline.

She rapped at the door.

There was no answer.

She tried the handle, found it unfastened, opened it and entered the room.

Isoline was kneeling on the carpet beside the bedstead, with her face down on the counterpane.

Volante went and took her hand to raise her.

"Isoline, love—Isoline," she said, "what made you scream so? It must have been something more startling than a step in the shrubbery."

"It was! Oh, it was!" gasped the girl.

"Tell me all about it, then," said the countess, gently, as she led the frightened creature to a lounge, placed her on it, sat beside her, and passed an arm around her waist.

"I will tell you, Volante, I will tell you. But, oh, do not treat lightly what I have to say! Do not! for it is the truth! It is the truth, as sure as I live to tell it! Oh,

Volante! oh, Volante! it will kill me!" panted the girl, shuddering, and covering her eyes with her hands.

"What was it, dear? Tell me, and you will feel better," whispered the countess soothingly.

"It was—something I saw!" gasped Isoline.

"What did you see in the shrubbery? Compose yourself, dear, and tell me."

"I—I—heard that cautious, creeping, crackling step the third time, and I—I—turned to listen, and I saw—saw—oh!——"

"Saw what, Isoline? Be reasonable, child, and speak out. You saw——"

"My dead mother's face!"

"What?"

"My dead mother's face peering at me, white and ghastly, between the dark foliage of the evergreens," said the girl, in a low, hoarse whisper, as she fixed her horror-stricken eyes on her friend's and shuddered through all her frame.

"Isoline! Isoline! collect your faculties, my love! What are you saying? You saw your mother's face? Impossible, you know! Your dear mother has been in the better world more than thirteen months."

"But I saw her face—I did! I did! It was no fancy! I was not then thinking of her! I was thinking of tramps or poachers who might be lurking in the shrubbery, and I turned and saw my mother's face peering at me through the evergreens. Oh, it gleamed so white and ghastly between the dark leaves of the *lignum vitæ!* I saw her! I saw her! I saw her!" cried Isoline, wildly, pressing her hands before her eyes and rocking her body back and forth.

Volante threw her arms around the distracted girl and held her firmly, while she tried to reason her out of what she called her hallucination.

But all to no purpose.

"You say it was fancy! imagination! hallucination! It was not! It was fact, truth, reality! As I live to speak, it was! Do I not know my own dear mother's face? I saw it plainly! I saw every feature! The sweet, low forehead, the level, black eyebrows, the beautiful, black eyes, the elegant aquiline nose, the perfect lips, the round-pointed, classic chin, the pure ivory complexion, the rip-

pling black hair, and the look of her dear face; the expression! the expression of sad, yearning, remorseful love! Oh, I saw it all! All in one instant of startling grief and horror! Do not tell me that I did not see it, for I know I did! Do not say it was impossible, for it was so!" vehemently insisted the girl.

"I cannot change my opinion that you have been the dupe of your imagination, dear Isoline. But I will not force this opinion upon you, nor longer combat your belief in the reality of your vision. To do so would be useless. Such hallucinations are the most difficult things in the world to conquer. But I will get you to bed at once and give you a sedative," said the countess, rising and touching the bell.

"Send the housekeeper to me," she said to the servant who answered the summons.

Mrs. Carraway came promptly.

"Miss Irvine has had a fright. She is very nervous. I wish you to prepare a sleeping draught for her, such as you have been in the habit of giving me when I have needed one."

"Yes, my lady."

"And send Greylock here."

"Yes, my lady."

The housekeeper left the room and was soon succeeded by the lady's maid, who entered full of sympathy and condolence for the frightened girl.

Isoline, who had not recovered any of her composure, repeated in agitated tones the story of the apparition she had seen in the park.

The countess frowned and turned away. She felt annoyed that this communication should have been made to Greylock. It was not the habit of her house to gossip with domestics.

"The woman will spread the story all through the neighborhood," she said to herself, as she mentally wondered at what she termed "Miss Irvine's want of dignity."

But poor Isoline, brought up in her mother's small household at Stony Fells, and accustomed to talk freely to the two simple, faithful women who were their only servants, saw no harm in opening her heart to the lady's maid.

"It was my own sweet mother's face! It was indeed, Mrs. Greylock!" she repeated, for the twentieth time.

"Hoot, toot, my dear young lady! It was one of the housemaids out sparking with her sweetheart! I'll give it to the fool to-morrow," replied the woman, as, having carefully undressed the girl, she lifted her up and laid her on the bed as tenderly as if Isoline had been an infant.

"As if I could mistake one of those round, red-cheeked, snub-nosed faces for the pure, pale, classic one of my dear mother! I know I saw my sweet mother's face to-night! But it is of no use to keep on saying it, so I will stop," said Isoline, impatiently. "But I will say one thing more," she added. "Before to-night I only believed in the life after death; but now I know of it, for I have seen my dead mother's living face!"

The entrance of the housekeeper with the sleeping draught put a stop to this conversation.

Isoline obediently drank it and lay down again, and very soon yielded to its benign influence.

The housekeeper left the room; but the countess and her maid remained at the bedside until the girl was fast asleep.

Then Lady Hawkewood arose to leave, but before doing so gave some instructions to Mrs. Greylock.

"I wish you to remain with Miss Irvine for an hour. I will look in at the end of that time, before retiring; and I must warn you not to gossip concerning this strange hallucination of Miss Irvine."

"Surely not, my lady. I hope I know my duty better," said Mrs. Greylock, with an injured look, and meaning, no doubt, to keep her word; though it is certain that the very next day, under temptation, she did whisper the secret to the housekeeper, the cook, the porter, the bulter, and the coachman; but only under the most solemn promise from each of inviolable secrecy.

And so the story got wind through all the country side, and afforded food for endless gossip and speculation. But this is going ahead.

When Lady Hawkewood left Miss Irvine's chamber she went directly to the drawing-room, where she found her mother and her two next sisters sitting.

"Your papa tells me that you had a fright in the park.

What was it? Nothing serious, I am led to believe," said the duchess.

"Oh! no, mamma, dear, nothing at all," replied the countess, who dropped into a corner of the sofa and gave the story of the adventure from her point of view.

"One of the maids, probably. It must not be permitted," said the duchess, coming to the same conclusion that had first been reached by Mrs. Greylock.

An hour later the family circle separated to retire to bed.

The countess, true to her word, looked into her friend's chamber, and finding the latter sleeping well, she dismissed the maid, and then withdrew to her own apartment.

Visions that appall at night often afford subjects of amusement by day. But morning brought no modification of Isoline's faith in the reality of the apparition she had seen in the park.

She arose refreshed from her deep and dreamless sleep, and she joined the family circle at breakfast looking in her usual health.

The duke and duchess attempted to jest with her on the terrors of the previous night.

But when the subject was mentoined she grew very pale, and laid down her fork. After a silence of a few seconds she said, in the most solemn manner:

"It was no illusion. As I live, I saw my mother's face —last night. The fact no longer frightens or distresses me—it only awes me; for heretofore I have only believed in the life after death, now I know it, since I have seen my dead mother's living face. I do not expect you to believe, me, however."

This ended all argument on the subject. Reason precluded the possibility of agreeing with the speaker, and politeness prevented her hearers from contradicting her.

And, indeed, other subjects soon came upon the tapis.

Breakfast at Castle Belle Isle was usually a lounging, lingering, informal meal, during which the members of the family dropped in at intervals, and the mail bag was brought, and letters and newspapers were glanced over.

The duke, with the *Times* open before him, looked over the foreign news while he sipped his coffee or nibbled his toast.

The duchess, with the *Court Journal* in her hand, read the "Fashionable Intelligence."

"Ah!" she said, looking up from her paper in a manner which immediately attracted the attention of the whole circle.

"What is it?" carelessly inquired the duke.

"Oh! it is the visit of the Prince of Orange, papa. I read it this morning. It is supposed that he comes to ask the hand of the Princess——"

"No, Volante, it is not that; but something that concerns us, or rather, Cosmo, more intimately," said the duchess, interrupting her daughter.

"His regiment ordered to Australia? I knew it was sure to be," put in the duke.

"Not at all; but something that may save him from the necessity of going to Australia, or even of remaining in the service," said the duchess.

"You speak in riddles," said the duke.

Isoline looked from one to the other, and listened with the deepest interest. All that concerned her lover was of the most vital imporatnce to her.

"I will read the paragraph," continued the duchess; and smoothing out the paper she read:

"The forthcoming marriage is announced of the Right Honorable Gilbert-Charles-John, Viscount Seyres, and Adelaide Mary, daughter of the late Rev. Henry Smith, and niece and sole heiress of the late Maria, Princess Zavieski."

"There! If that is true, as I presume it to be, Miss Smith forfeits by the terms of her grandaunt's will the whole of the Zavieski estate, which will now revert to Cosmo Belle Isle, our nephew," concluded the duchess, with a look of satisfaction.

"No, mamma, I think not—unfortunately," said the countess.

"Volante!" exclaimed the duchess.

"Well, mamma, dear, I really wish there was the shadow of a hope in that direction for poor Cos.; but there's not. At the time the will of the Princess Zavieski was published

and commented on, the subject was discussed, and it was decided, by the press at least, that the clause respecting the marriage only restrained the legatee during the life of the testator, but not afterward."

"I had not seen those comments," sighed the duchess.

"And you may be sure that this intended marriage between the aged and impoverished Viscount Seyres and the middle-aged heiress of Zavieski, is one of pure barter—wealth for title. This being so, I think the old bankrupt has too long a head to make a mistake as to the inheritance. His lordship's solicitor probably examined the will and gave a favorable opinion before his lordship proposed to the heiress," said the duke.

"True. You must be right," sighed the duchess.

And the breakfast party soon after arose from the table, and the subject of the Princess Zavieski's will, and her heiress' marriage, was dropped for the time.

CHAPTER XXX

THE WITCH AT WORK

Nan Crook had long ago received her share of the reward offered for the recovery of Mrs. Berners Irvine's dead body.

But as soon as she had cashed the check, receiving the money all in shining golden sovereigns, she began to change her mind about moving away from the neighborhood and living honestly.

To move away and live honestly would oblige her to spend some of these coins—the splendid, glistening, golden coins! She could not bear to part with one of them, and she would not part with one of them! She would rather have them—the beauties!—to gaze on than all the necessaries, comforts, or luxuries they could bring her. She put the little, yellow canvas bag in which she received them from the Hawkeville banker into her bosom, next to her heart, stopped at a hardware store on the High Street, bought a revolver, and went home to the strong room in the Ruined Tower.

Young Nan was absent.

She was alone. She fastened the door and window and

sat down, drew the little bag from her bosom and emptied its contents upon her lap, gazed at them, gloated over them, lifted them in her hands and let them trickle in a golden stream through her large, horny fingers. She sat a long time absorbed in this morbid delight, and until she was aroused by a loud knocking at the door.

She listened, but uttered no word, made no motion, gave no sound or sign of her presence.

She was determined not to open that door until she had hidden her treasure safely away.

The knocking at the door grew louder, and was succeeded by a shaking, and then by a swearing, and then by the muttered words:

"The old cuss hasn't got home yet," as the applicant for admission retreated.

Nan listened until his steps died slowly away, and then laughed slowly to herself, saying:

"Ah! you were soon on my trail, knowing that I had this money about me, Dennis Prout! 'Tain't likely as I'd let you in till I had put it all outen your way! You'd cut my throat for a hunder pound, or less money, as soon as look at me! Thought you'd catch me here alone with the booty and Nan gone, did you? Ah, but you didn't know I had the six-shooter! Thought it would be easy to slit the old 'oman's wizzand and hide her body down in the cave and walk off with the money, did ye? Fool! If my pistil had a-been loaded I'd a-let you in to see what you'd a-been at! And at the first sign of deviltry I'd a-put a bullet through your brains with more satisfaction than ever I ett when I was hungry! But now to load my pistil and hide my money!" she concluded, as she slowly replaced the coins in the bag and began to consider where she could safely bestow them.

It was in this manner that Old Nan received her treasure and brought it home.

Before she had got this money she had been perfectly sincere in her desire and intention of using it as a means of getting away from the Ruined Tower and living a safer, if not an honester life; but on seeing and handling the shining coins of precious gold, Old Nan had been suddenly smitten with the miser's madness, and henceforth became

the prey of two pursuing passions—a horrible fear of losing her treasure and a fierce desire of adding to it.

She concealed her money in cunning hiding-places, but never deemed it secure. She was afraid to leave it in the house lest some one should steal it in her absence. She was afraid to take it abroad with her lest some one should creep up behind her, knock her down and rob her of it.

She distrusted everyone, even her most intimate friends and associates—though it is true she had but little reason to think well of these last-mentioned worthies.

She suspected Dennis Prout of being a murderer at heart, and Young Nan of being a thief in intention.

She did not hold her life or her money to be secure for an hour.

She carried her loaded revolver in her bosom constantly. She changed the hiding-place of her treasure daily, or as often as the absence of Young Nan gave her an opportunity of working in secret.

And she told many a lie as to the disposal of her funds. Not that anyone questioned her on the subject. Young Nan, who was disgusted with the whole fraudulent transaction, disdained to make any inquiries.

Dennis Prout, whose grasping spirit longed to clutch the treasure, was too politic to seem to take any interest in the matter.

But Old Nan was at pains to mislead them both.

"Ah," she said one night, when the good Mr. Prout was taking a social mug of ale with the two women at the tower —"ah! I hev made a grand invistment of my hunder punds! A gentleman hev borrowed it o' me at tin per cint. intirist."

"That's high! I hope you've got good security," replied Prout, who did not believe a word she said, but, on the contrary, felt assured that the money was concealed somewhere in the tower and watched his opportunity to discover and purloin it.

"Ou, ay! the very bist iv security! Trust me for that!" replied Old Nan, chuckling.

Young Nan never took part in these discussions, but sat in a moody, disapproving silence.

As the weeks passed off and slipped into months, Old

Nan's desire to hold and to increase her hoard grew into a monomania. She was gnawed by a ravenous hunger for gold. She did not care much for silver, and not at all for copper. She would spend the pennies, shillings, and crowns she got for doctoring, fortune telling, or other quackeries, freely enough; but every sovereign she received as her share of the booty when aiding and abetting the smugglers, she would add carefully to her hidden pile.

These golden coins were few and far between. Strange how unprofitable as well as dangerous she found her unlawful traffic.

She cast about in her mind how to increase her store more rapidly. If she could only double it, she thought she would be satisfied. If some one else would only commit murder or suicide, or do something else to cause a reward to be offered for discoveries made! Then her craft and skill might secure the reward again as before!

To be sure, there was the missing body of the murdered earl. A very large reward had been offered for the recovery of that, but without results. And now so much time had passed that unless the body had been embalmed it could not be produced.

And now the terms of the reward had been changed. Money was offered, not for the restoration of the remains, but for information that might lead to the detection and punishment of the body snatchers.

Oh, how intensely Old Nan coveted this reward!

She cast about in her mind how she could possibly obtain it! How she could possibly discover that mystery, which had baffled the ingenuity of the most skillful and experienced of the London and Paris detectives.

A clairvoyant!

If she could only get hold of a clairvoyant and a piece of the earl's clothing that had not been washed or worn by anyone else since he left it off! Or, better still, if she could get a lock of his hair!

She sat and studied. The old wretch possessed the power of a mesmerist in a very good degree, without more than half knowing what she could do with it. Now, while she pondered, the arch fiend brought two facts to her remembrance—one was that the mesmerizer, having once put the

clairvoyant into a magnetic sleep, retained thenceforth over the subject a certain degree of will power.

She determined to exercise this spell upon Lona Pond, and draw the girl from her safe home at Hawkewood Hall to the Ruined Tower, and throw her into a trance, to discover, through her clairvoyant faculties, the whereabouts of what might remain of the late Earl of Hawkewood's material form.

But to do this successfully it was absolutely necessary that she should have something that was magnetically related to the eirl—a piece of his clothing, a lock of his hair —something that he had handled or worn.

Then the fact flashed upon her memory that Jemmy Babb, the eccentric village barber, had a museum of human hair, in which he kept specimens of all the heads upon which he had ever operated.

Rumor declared that "Uncle Jemmy," as he was popularly called, had hair enough to stuff a mattress; but that must have been an exaggeration.

Nan resolved to pay a visit to Jemmy's shop and see what she could get from him.

She lost no time in carrying this resolution into effect.

Early the next morning she walked to the village.

Passing before the barber shop she saw that he was operating on the chin of the parish clerk, and she walked away and waited until she saw him leave the shop.

Then she went in, and finding Uncle Jemmy alone, and engaged in wiping his razors, she first conciliated the old man by purchasing some of his pomades and perfumeries "for her daughter," as she explained, and then she opened her real business:

"Mr. Babb, do you still keep locks of your customers' hair?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Crook, mum."

"Have you got any of the dead earl's?"

"I should just think I had, Mrs. Crook, mum! Hevn't I cut his lordship's hair ever since he was a babby! Didn't I cut and trim it the very day of the feast which was the last day of his lordship's life—rest his soul! Look at that book up there, mum! The seventh one from the corner. It contains his lordship's hair."

"Would yer mind letting a body see it, Mr. Babb?"

"Law, no, Mrs. Crook, mum, surely not," said the old man, reaching down the book which was labeled in writing:

"Sacred to the memory of Lord Hawkewood."

"Here, mum, is a lock of his lordship's hair for every year of his life, from the time he was seven years old, when I first operated on his lordship's hair perfessionally, to the day his lordship was nineteen years of age, when I last had the honor of officiating. See, mum!" said the barber, turning over the leaves of the book that somewhat resembled a small herbarium, with human hair instead of leaves and flowers for specimens. "See, mum, at seven years of age his little lordship's hair was flaxen, at ten, over here, it was auburn, at thirteen, see, it was chestnut, at sixteen, brown, at nineteen black."

"And this is the last?"

"Yes, mum, the black is the last as ever I cut off his head."

"Now, Mr. Babb, I hev come to you on a very delikit messidge from a young lady as was very fond of the poor murdered young lord, and wants a lock of his lordship's hair as a keepsake, poor soul! Now, Mr. Babb, you'd never have the harrde heart to refuse her a little bit of this black curl! Ivver sich a little bit would do for her to kiss and cry over, you know, poor thing! You'd not have the heart to refuse her!"

"Law bless you, no, Mrs. Crook! You don't think I'm sich a brute beast, do you? I'll give the poor young lady half I have got, willing. Who did you say she was, again?" inquired the little barber, who was very full of sentiment, as you might know by his saving the locks of hair as memorials of his customers.

"I didn't say who she was; but I will say it now if you will keep the secret," said Old Nan.

"I will keep the secret to my dying day, Mrs. Crook, mum," said the little man, much interested.

"Well, then, it was Miss Isoline Irvine," whispered Old Nan.

"Ah! poor child! poor child! 'The course of true love never did,' you know, and never will, I reckon. Here, Mrs. Crook, mum, here's a good two-thirds of the black curl, just

as it was cut off of his blessed head by these identical fingers of mine on that dementable day preceding his lordship's death," said the kindly old man, as he detached the tress from the page and handed it to Old Nan, adding:

"Give it to the young lady with James Babb's respectful love, and tell as he has been through it all hisself, which is the reason why he is a lonesome old bachelor to this day."

"Ah! was she murdered, Mr. Babb?" inquired Old Nan, out of idle curiosity.

"Bless you, no mum! She married Carr, the parish clerk!"

"Oh! then I think you should be thankful for your escape! That 'oman has the temper of a wild cat and the tongue of a viper! Well, good-by, Mr. Babb! It is very kind of you to send the lock of hair, and Miss Isoline Irvine will vally it highly, you may depend," said Old Nan, as she arose to leave the shop.

"Good-by, Mrs. Crook, mum, which you and the young lady be kindly welcome to the token," replied the old barber, who, perceiving another customer approaching, would not offer to detain his visitor.

Old Nan hurried from the shop, nearly falling over Traverse, the Hawkewood steward, who was coming in.

She walked rapidly on in the direction toward the Ruined Tower, at which she arrived about noon.

As she drew near the place she saw a young girl seated on the sill of the fastened door.

As this girl arose and came to meet her, Old Nan recognized Lona Pond, who, with her light flaxen hair, light-blue eyes, and fair, thin face, in contrast with her black gown, sack, and hat, looked whiter, thinner, and more ghostly than ever.

"Ah, ha! has my will worked upon her so quickly?" asked Old Nan of herself, as they met.

But probably not Old Nan's will, but Lona Pond's own wish brought the girl to the ruined tower, as she soon explained.

"How dy' do, Lona! You here? Wot fotch ye, gel? I hevn't got a glimp of ye since I told yer fortin at Stony Fells, soon after yer lost yer missus," began Mrs. Crook.

"No, ma'am, nor wouldn't now, but I can't stand it no longer," replied the visitor.

"Can't stand wot no longer? But come inter the house, me gel, and sit down. I'm dead beat myself, heving walked all the way to Hawkeville and back again," said Old Nan, as they reached the door of the tower, and she drew a key from her pocket and unlocked it.

Lona followed her into the strong room and sat down on the side of the bed, while Old Nan dropped into the rude but comfortable armchair.

"Where is Mrs. Nan?" inquired the girl, looking around.

"Yer didn't expect to find her locked in here, did yer? Nan's doing a day's washing at Farmer Perry's. The missus is brought to bed there. A fine boy. Now, wot was it yer couldn't stand no longer, Lona?"

A slight flush came to the fair white cheek of the girl, and she hesitated and spoke low, with averted face, as she answered:

"It was about—Mr.—Gow."

"Ham?"

"Yes, ma'am. I—haven't heard—from him—since he went away," murmured the girl.

"Yes, you hev! Yer've forgotten! The day I put yer in a trance, yer saw him gay and happy on a outbound ship, with the snow-white sails a-flapping over his head and the bright, blue waters flashing all around him, and he a-gazing on your doggy-type and a-thinking on you. Don't yer remember?"

"I remember you told me so."

"And didn't yer believe me?" inquired Old Nan resentfully.

"Yes, ma'am, but that wasn't like hearing from him. He did warn me that morning when he went away as he was going a long, long, long sea voyage, quite to the other end of the world, and how I mightn't hear from him for a year, unless he had the luck to meet a home-bound ship. But it has been more'n a year now, Mrs. Crook."

"Only a little more. Well, now, wot do yer want me to do?"

"I only want you to tell me if you have heard from him

since he went away," replied Lona Pond, in the same timid and hesitating manner.

"No, I hevn't heard from him since he has been gone, except that once when I put you in a trance and sent yer to look for him, and yer found him on shipboard all right an dtold me wot yer saw. Now, do yer want me to put yer into another trance, and send yer to see where he is now?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Crook, but how can you do it?"

"Same as I did before."

"How was that?"

"I am a most powerful strong megnertyzer and yer a fust-class clar-woy-ant. Yer've heerd tell of sich things before?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Crook; it is very strange. But how is it that I forget what I see in my trance?"

"All clar-woy-ants do."

"I wish I could only remember. It would be such a comfort."

"None of 'em ever does. Now, are yer all ready?"

"Yes," said Lona Pond, laying aside her gloves, hat, and sack, and submitting herself to the will of the magnetizer.

"Now, sit in this armchair, lean back, lay out your arms on the arms of the chair, look me right in the eyes."

Lona Pond obeyed all these orders.

Then Old Nan Crook, ignorant as a mule, and strong as one, began to wield the power that she possessed without comprehending—the power that is utterly independent of intellect or education, and that is more frequently exercised by the ignorant and brutal than by the refined and cultivated—the dangerous power that resided in her temperament, and is rightly called "animal" magnetism.

The fair, fragile girl, sensitive and susceptible, soon yielded to the powerful passes and sank itno a profound mesmeric sleep.

Old Nan stood up and took breath while she gazed upon her subject.

She had no intention of sending Lona Pond in search of Ham Gow. She meant to send the clairvoyant after the mortal remains of the late Earl of Hawkewood, that she

might discover their fate and claim the reward which had been offered for such a service.

With this object in view she took the little parcel of tissue paper from her pocket, unrolled it, took out the soft, shining black curl of the young earl's hair and held it to the forehead of the entranced girl, saying:

"Follow this man."

What old Nan discovered will be told in another volume under the title of "A Tortured Heart," handsomely bound in cloth, and uniform with this volume.

THE END OF "THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT."

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THE TEST OF LOVE.

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